



RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 04

Er Mu

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

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Synopsis

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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Chapter 301 - Bomb And Wine

The day after the witches from Sleeping Island moved into their new home, Roland called City Hall Premier Minister Barov to his office.

“I want you to issue another recruitment notice,” Roland said, while he pushed the first draft of details in front of Barov, “A week long temporary job for about ten people, preferably women.”

Barov picked up the paper, read it again before asking. “Your Highness, excuse me... what is starch?”

“Do you know about wheat flour?”

The Premier minister hesitated, “Are you referring to coarse powder or fine powder? Wheat grains, after grinding, can be baked into bread or wheat cake. And if instead of using it you go a step further and filter out the bran, you get a fine powder. The output of the latter is only 6 / 10 of the former, and bread baked with it is softer, but its price is also very high, so only powerful aristocratic families are able to afford it.”

The thing Roland liked the most about Barov, was that he had a comprehensive understanding concerning goods from all categories. Food shortage as a result of the lagging agriculture could mean something completely different depending on the consumer's social class. For example, with the frequently seen wheat, civilians would often put the wheat grains directly into their pot and cook congee, this way making the most out of their

limited food. However, sometimes wheat shells and sand would also land in the boiling pot which results in crackling sounds and cause tooth pains whenever they ate.

Small aristocrats paid particular attention to this and would order people to sieve the sand and stones out of the wheat grain. Then they would grind it into a coarse powder, and bake it into bread or pancake before eating.

And at the top of the hierarchy, the wealthy families and powerful aristocrats, who didn't look at food as a mere way to fill their stomachs, but rather, as something to be enjoyed. The wheat would be further sieved in the kitchen, removing the bran, to get fine white powder. The resulting baked bread was of yellowish cream color and when eaten not only tasted exquisite but also had a much sweeter flavor.

“The basis of starch is a fine powder which then goes through another purifying process,” Roland explained. “After you hire the people, I'll send someone who will instruct them on what exactly we need them to do.”

“Then, continue to process?” Barov couldn't stop himself shouting out loud in shock, “How much wheat will they be needing for this?”

“I do not need too much, only three or four hundred kilograms ...” Roland paused, before opening his mouth again, “Fill up a basket that is about the size of my table.”

Barov nodded and asked further, “Why do they need to be woman?”

“Because they will do things more carefully. Moreover, I want to see more woman following the path of a worker, instead of being idle at home,” Roland, suddenly had an idea, so he asked, “At present, it seems that the education of Border Town’s women’s classes are progressing more quickly, right?”

“Although the head of the Ministry of Education is Lady Scroll, the situation is indeed like this. They can’t do much more than taking care of the children and do housework, so they spend most of their time increasing their reading and writing skills.”

“That being the case, I request that after the next round of examination, you will take the lead for the City Hall and recruit a batch of female apprentice, in that way gradually expanding the proportion of women posts,” Roland commanded.

“Your Highness, this... there is no precedent for it,” Barov complained. “If they only have to be careful, my apprentice aren’t worse than any woman.”

“If there is no precedent we have to create one,” Roland bluntly said. “This is also the easiest and quickest way to increase the labor force without expanding the total population. If all woman can take on a small task in building Border Town, my available staff will double. The only thing I’m asking you to do is to lead people to change their view. As long as the pay is attractive, I think they should come over on their own one by one.”

After Barov retired, Roland heard Nightingale's laughter next to his ear, followed by her asking a question, "What kind of delicious thing are you planning to make this time?"

"Starch? It's not something you can eat," Roland said, after taking a mouthful of tea, "Even though you can indeed get some pretty good food from the leftover materials after processing."

First soak fine wheat flour in water, then rub and scrub it until the water had entirely blanched, then move on to another water basin and continue. In the end, it will become a sticky mass known as gluten. The gluten can be used for deep-fry or stir-fry and has a texture which is both pliable and tough. When smeared with honey or sprinkled with flavoring after leaving the pot, all in all, it made for a very delicious meal.

But Roland's focus was not on food.

By sifting and afterward letting the milky white water stand still, it would form a precipitation which was precisely the starch he was looking for, and was also a main ingredient used in manufacturing explosives.

Since the experiments with nitroglycerin hadn't started yet, there was no possibility that he would have access to TNT, so [nitrostarch](#) was his most immediate opportunity for making powerful explosives, it also shared the same manufacturing process as nitrocellulose. The finished product had a low sensitivity, and couldn't be ignited by an open fire, instead, one

needed to use a fuse for it to detonate. Furthermore, it was more powerful than TNT and had thus been widely used as a substitute for it during the two world wars.

With highly pure starch, the alchemic apprentices who already knew the manufacturing process for nitrocellulose by heart should also be able to quickly prepare a batch of nitrostarch.

After lunch, just as Roland was planning to go back to his room to take a nap, he suddenly heard someone knocking on his door.

Nine out of ten times it was Anna who would come to find him at this hour. So when he heard the knocking sound, his heartbeat immediately began to dance. Can it be, after falling asleep last time because of her exhausted, she decided to come over at noon?

“Come in.”

However, the door creaked as it was pushed open, and Roland started when he saw Evelyn standing outside.

This... now, isn't what I've been expecting at all. He coughed twice, then showed a reassuring smile as he asked, “What's the matter?”

Hearing his question, Evelyn entered the room, and walked over to the edge of the table and bowed down in salute, all in all she seemed a bit nervous, “Your Highness, I would like to ask you a question.”

Don't tell me it is going to be the same question again, 'Why are you so kind to us witches'? However, in accordance with treating them like comrades, it was important to be as warm as the spring wind, so he smiled and said, "What question do you want to ask?"

"You... why did you want me to come to Border Town?"

For a moment Roland was slightly surprised, can it be that she doesn't like the taste of the wine?

"My kind of ability isn't only inferior to Sylvie's; it is practically at the same level as Lotus and Honey's," she whispered. "It's just wine tasting. However, a monthly salary of one gold royals is already enough for you to hire a specialized Wine Brewer from King's City."

"What are your thoughts about those... wines?"

"At first I thought they burned too much, only by slowly drinking them was I able to accept them. As for those three wines mixed with ice cubes, fruit juice, and syrup, their taste is richer. But that is merely my personal opinion," Evelyn replied cautiously. "My family's pub only sold cheaply-priced wines and diluted ales, the aristocracy's tendencies ...I do not know anything about that."

As it turns out she isn't questioning the wine, the Prince breathed out in relief. He got up and opened the bookcase, then took out a jar of ale from the top and put it in front of Evelyn with the question, "Can you turn this jar of ale into the wine I brewed?"

“I think... that shouldn’t be a problem.” She stretched out her hand, and held it above the jar, a moment later the yellow ale began to change. In the wake of the rising bubbles, the ale became more and more clear, until it finally turned as crystal clear as plain boiled water; yet Roland could already smell its strong alcoholic fragrance. Unable to stop himself, he dipped his finger in a little, then put it into his mouth. It tasted bitter and burning at the same time, this was the taste of highly purified alcohol.

Roland couldn’t help but begin to laugh, while saying, “That’s the reason I picked you.”

Looking at the puzzled Evelyn, he patted her hand and explained, “I’m going to set up an alcohol factory... No, a brewery. Would you like to be the chief winemaker?”

Chapter 302 - The Bugle Horn Of The Decisive Battle

At the palace in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, flames were raging within the fireplace.

Compared to Graycastle with its four seasons, here the summers were especially short, and the autumn was only like an advance notice for the impending arrival of a severe winter. There wasn't even enough time to change into shorter garments before the cold wind came back once again.

Garcia Wimbledon, sat on the throne with a fox fur coat draped over her shoulders, listening to the complaints and demands of the nobility.

She didn't like the palace. The pillars, walls, and floors were all built out of snow white stones, each piece polished until it was smooth and shining, just like ice in general. Despite the fact that she already had two additional layers of cushion on her seat, she could still feel the bitter chill of the cold iron chair.

This damned castle is like an iceberg, absolutely frustrating! I'll wait for the situation to stabilize, and the first thing I'm going to do after that is to smash all of the walls and floors to bits then re-lay it with dark brown granite slabs afterward.

"Your Majesty, I hope you can bring justice for me," a noble said, looking at her with a scowling expression.

Prior to this, he had used a lot of words, where in fact, a few would have been sufficient. At the time when the Church was occupying the Kingdom of Endless Winter, some nobles who had done many evils deeds had been put on a public trial which had been presided over by Archbishop Heather. Most of the nobles had been sent to the gallows. However, this guy was among the lucky ones and had only been punished with the confiscation of his assets, which had then been equally divided among the victims.

“I can understand your request; private property shouldn’t be plundered,” Garcia pondered for a moment and then slowly said, “But the specific amount is hard to define. Well, if you can provide me with the testaments of the last five years of financial income and expenditure, I can evaluate an average value and give you a part of the of the seizures as compensation.”

“But the mob has looted my house, and I’m afraid the records are...”

“Then I can only follow the published announcement and compensate you according to your title.” Garcia interrupted, “Take a look around you, they are all nobles who have suffered from looting, if I give you more, some of them would end up getting less.”

“That’s right! Only God would know if the number you reported is the truth or not!”

“Why are you so troublesome, Knight Halon, these gold royals

aren't yours."

"You have it already quite good, just take a look at your associates, they can only go to heaven and find God to demand compensation."

Seeing all of the surrounding nobles glare at him, he was forced to shrink back, bow deep in salute and say, "In that case, please compensate me according to the standard. Thank you for your kindness, Your Majesty."

"Excellent," Garcia smiled and then ordered, "Next."

"My regards to you, Your Majesty," a white-haired old man stepped out of the crowd and caressed the glittering silver heron family emblem on his chest reverently.

"Marquis Bodø, I remember that the Church's thugs didn't attack your territory."

"Yes, that's right," he nodded, "Not that they didn't want to, rather that they couldn't... the Inundated Snow Ridge is difficult to attack. So, my Knights were able to block all of the invading bandits. However, my child wasn't as fortunate. On the day of the riots, he was on duty within the imperial palace, and for the purpose of protecting the Queen, not only was he killed by the believers, but his body was also hung above the city gate. It was not until you arrived in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, that he could be freed from his humiliation."

“That’s truly a tragic story,” Garcia assumed a grieving expression and sighed, before asking, “So, what is your request?”

“The name of the man who killed him is ‘The Butcher’, nowadays he is the leader of the remaining rebels. That group of people are hiding within the Impassable Mountain Range north of us. I want revenge for my child.” The Marquis calmly declared.

“From the beginning, I didn’t have that many troops under my control. They are already keeping the peace during the day, patrol, guard the city wall as well as the granary; it would be quite difficult to split my men and dispatch the troop to the barren mountains and wild hills just to go find a group of one hundred exiled thugs.” She shook her head and said in regret, “Furthermore, when the winter comes, the heavy snowfall will also close off the mountains, thus, making it impossible for them to get any supplies. So, they will freeze to death sooner or later; there is no need for you to be so impatient.”

“Your Majesty, I’ll only be able to find peace if it’s me wielding the sword that kills my child’s murderer. I also don’t need you to send any warriors to search for the thugs. There are many natural caves at the foot of the mountain; they surely will be hidden within one of them. But most of the cave’s entrances are very narrow, and if they used stones to block the entrance, it would even be difficult for the Knights to attack them. I hope you can provide me with the alchemical creation that had been able to blow up the city gates; I’ll do the rest by myself.”

Does he want to get his hands on the snow powder? Garcia frowned, that stuff has a large power, and it’s strong enough to be

the trump card in a hopeless war and alter the outcome, it absolutely cannot be allowed to spread out.

At the time, she was about to declare her refusal, the other opened his mouth again, “If you grant me this request, I am willing to return to court and serve you. The silver heron family will fully support your ruling over the Kingdom of Eternal Winter.”

This sentence then made Garcia swallow her words. At the time, the Church executed the Queen; they also killed some chief ministers. Here, the Marquis of Bodø has a lot of prestige, if he were to serve as my Prime Minister, all the remaining nobles would follow along. To some degree, it can also make up for the deficient administration and also turn around this awkward situation.

“This request is not too much,” she thought for a while, then after finally coming to a decision she said, “But I cannot put the alchemy powder directly into your hands. When you require it, I will send a special alchemist who will provide you with assistance to blow open the hole.”

After the end of the court session, Garcia returned to the back room, where Ryan was already waiting for her with a cup of warmed fruit wine, “Thanks for your trouble, Your Majesty. As expected, those nobles were all taken over by you. In this way, even if we don’t depend on the Wolf King, you can still swallow the entire Kingdom of Eternal Winter slowly.”

“As long as there is no Church,” the Queen said as she shrugged.

The Church, in their act of stripping the nobles of their rightful inheritance, had pushed them to her side. Now, with the support of those very people, coupled with the crippling of the Church’s former base of power, it had been very easy for her to gain a foothold in the capital. But if she wanted to control the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, she still had a long way left to go – it was here where the people were influenced by the Church the most. When she’d dispatched her Black Sail Fleet to wipe out the Church’s bases in other major cities, they had continually suffered under the attack of the believers. Therefore, it was crucial to form a coalition with the Wolfsheart Kingdom. Not only so that they could resist the Church together, but also to weaken the influence the Church held over the population by accepting people from Wolfsheart Kingdom.

As for those stubborn civilians, it will be alright if they are just cleanly killed off.

“Oh, by the way, a messenger from the Wolfsheart Kingdom has arrived with a letter for you,” Ryan informed her, as he took an envelope from his pocket, “Because you were dealing with government affairs, I didn’t dare to bother you.”

Garcia opened the envelope, took out the letter, and began to read the letter carefully.

“Is it bad news?”

“The Church has sent out troops once again,” she said in a low voice, “They’ve taken the land route and are heading straight for Wolfsheart City. They’ve already broken through several of the recently set up defensive lines.”

“What?” Ryan started with big eyes at her in disbelief, then he said, “The Months of Demons will be coming soon, don’t tell me they’ve set out while completely disregarding the New Holy City?”

Showing a frowning expression, Garcia sat back in her desk.

She knew that the Church would never let them go, but she hadn’t expected that the other side would move so fast. If they had just waited with the war until spring next year, her preparation would have been complete. However, the enemy apparently didn’t want to give them any space to breathe – if she just sat idly while the Wolfsheart Kingdom asked for help, and the kingdom got destroyed as a result, it wouldn’t be long before it would be her turn to disappear.

But this also contained an opportunity.

If she could make the Church waste its forces on the city walls of the Wolfsheart City, they would be facing a great disaster when the demonic beasts invaded Hermes at a large scale.

They might have sent out the God’s Punishment Army, but by now, she also had formidable weapons like the snow powder, the hard to extinguish black river water, the demonic fire powder, as well as Wolfsheart City’s towering city walls. With all this, she

would surely be able to consume a large number of their vital forces.

Thinking until here, Garcia commanded, “Pass along my orders, the Black Sail Fleet is to get ready for battle! This year, we will be spending the winter within Wolfsheart City.”

Chapter 303 - Preparation For The Air Raid

After going through a week of assembling and testing, Roland and Anna together completed the development of an impact detonator.

Compared to the fuse of the artillery shells, it does not need to withstand high temperature and pressure, and there was also no high-G overload when it left the chamber, so the structure was very simple. However, due to the necessary precise constitution of the firing pin and the spring, the two had to test many variations before they finally succeeded.

The main problem was that no one knew how much elasticity the spring needed, to make sure that it wouldn't go off if it accidentally fell. While they also needed to guarantee that it would always trigger when it was launched normally.

He and Anna only changed the thickness and hardness of the spring a little before testing it once again.

Fortunately, Anna and Lucia had done a lot of the required work in advance. As a result, Roland had more and more high-quality materials available at hand. Ultimately, after a lot of testing they'd chosen to use steel alloy No. 1365, which had a relatively high hardness, but a toughness that was on the lower side. Even if the bomb fell from one meter, it wouldn't be compressed to the end.

After the selection of an appropriate spring, the rest was easy. Just like the saying: where water flows, a canal would form. Even

though Roland had never seen the look of a real detonator before, he could still rely on his work's experience to come up with a design by himself.

Compared to modern ones it was certainly lacking, but for the current crude big black bombs, this would be enough.

The finished version of the impact detonator was in the form of a cylinder, twelve centimeters long, about five centimeters in diameter, with a spiral pattern on the underside which could be screwed into the opening at the top of the bomb.

The interior looked like a downwards convex groove, while the firing pin shared a similar appearance, so that it could also fit into the groove. In its normal state, the spring would lock the upper part within the indentation, while the striker would land right inside the indentation, only one finger apart from the primer. For the purpose of taking precautions, Roland had also made a hole in the head of the firing pin, so that a bolt could be fixed on top of the ammunition case. Thus, before the bombing, they first had to pull out the bolt, only then could the strike move up and down.

The simulation test was held on a sunny afternoon.

Because this bomb which filled with a padding of gravels instead of black gunpowder, had already reached five times Nightingales weight, Roland decided not to board the hot air balloon, and instead watched the process with an observation mirror from three hundred meters away from the impact location.

Apart from himself, there was also the Commander of the Fist Army Iron Axe and the Chief Knight Carter Lannis, who were here to watch this first test.

“Are you planning to use a hot air balloon to throw the giant explosive packages into the heart of the imperial palace?” After listening to Roland’s battle plan, Carter struggled to believe his ears. To attack from an altitude of two kilometers above the ground while simultaneously completely disregarding the city walls and the forces of the garrison, ultimately overturned his former concept of what defined combat – and of course, living in Border Town during this last year, his view had already gone through changes many times before.

“As long as the controlling system is fully functioning it really isn’t impossible to achieve,” Roland nodded. “Right now, Timothy is pressing people into service once more, to build up his new militia force. If we cannot stop him, the Western Territory will inevitably suffer another attack from his drugged forces. And even if we force him back again, it won’t give us even one bit of benefit.”

The secret letter that Theo had sent had indicated that Timothy was currently still using the same old routine of trying to consume his strength. However, Roland didn’t know if the team dispatched by Barov could overtake their counterparts and rope in the people and make them come to Border Town.

“Supposing that you can really release heaven’s fury thunder above Timothy’s head, he absolutely will be frightened, not knowing what to do!” Iron Axe said excitedly, “This is absolutely a

heaven's punishment which no one can resist!"

"That's what I'm hoping for," Roland said with a smile.

Although Theo had mentioned in the letter that Timothy had most likely figured out the method for making black gunpowder and opened a workshop in the inner city to try and mass produce the dangerous product, after thinking it over repeatedly, Roland still decided that the roof of the imperial palace should be the target of the bombing.

The reason was simple, the palace was the only place which was eye-catching enough.

When looking from a height of two thousand meters, even the most magnificent city of Graycastle was only the size of half a palm. Therefore, they also had to find a good target point to throw off the bomb in advance. And the palace was located at the midpoint of the inner-city district, and was surrounded by a red tile wall. Furthermore, pure white stones covered the roof of the palace, would be particularly eye-catching while they were aiming, which meant it would almost be impossible for them to miss their target.

But the workshop was different.

Roland didn't possess a layout plan of King's City, and the ground was also unmanned, and if he only relied on spoken words it would be quite difficult to describe the position of the selected target. Plus, the workshop's area wasn't large. If the bomb were to

fall on top of a civilian's house, the gains of their plan wouldn't make up for the losses they would face.

Suddenly, a white shadow fell straight to the ground, causing a smoke pillar to rise from the test field, followed by the muffling sound of something smashing into the ground a moment later.

“It seems as if the bomb has hit the ground,” Roland put away the mirror, “Let's go and take a look at the result.”

After a week of training, Lightning had significantly improved her bombing technique. This time, the bomb had hit the ground five meters away from the center of the target. It had drilled its whole body into the earth and the outer shell had been substantially deformed due to the force of the impact.

After Cloud Gazer had landed, Anna used her black flame to cut open the bomb, so that everyone could see that the soil near the detonator has been charred black – this proved that the primer's temperature was high enough to ignite the gas sprinkled on top of the gravel, which was what they had used in place of black gunpowder, and this showed that the detonator itself was working fine. If they instead filled the interior of the bomb with nitrated starch, it could easily create a four to six meters deep hole, and kill all of the people who hadn't taken shelter that were within the vicinity of 50 meters.

Now, after having fully trained the air drop, the next step was to organize their combat plan.

Roland let his gaze wander over everyone surrounding him, then opened his mouth and slowly said, “We will execute the surprise raid on King’s City next Monday. First, Iron Axe will lead a group of fifty firearms and escort the witches to the outskirts of Silver City. There is a mountain ridge in the area which can shelter you from detection, and it should be perfect if you want to set up camp or send off a balloon.”

“I hear and obey, Your Majesty!” Iron Axe agreed.

“Why can’t we just fly directly from Border Town?” Wendy asked.

“No, that would be too far,” Roland shook his head, from the Western Territory to King’s City it took at least a week. When traveling with Cloud Gazer or flying directly there, it would still take them around three days, together with the return trip it would be six days. Furthermore, after the installing the dropping mechanism, the basket would only have enough space to carry two people, which meant that Nightingale would be unable to follow them. With the exception of Anna, none of the other witches had any fighting ability, so making them spend six nights in the wild it would be much too high a risk, which was something that would be impossible for him to feel at ease about. “By starting from Silver City, you will be able to complete the bombing in just one day and return even before the sun goes down.”

“Secondly, the witches assigned to the mission are Anna, Wendy, Lightning, Maggie, Nightingale and Sylvie. The latter two are responsible for monitoring the surroundings of the camp, while the attack will be carried out by the first four people according to

the training method, especially Lightning,” he looked towards the little girl, “Whether we succeed or not all depends on you.”

“You can leave it to me.” The latter patted her chest.

“In that case, the last thing I wanted to mention was that you should all pay attention to your safety,” Roland said while stressing each word, “I will be waiting for your return here in Border Town.”

Four days later, the first bomb 'Easterly Wind No.1' was loaded on top of a cart, and under the escort of the First Army, it boarded a cargo ship to Silver City.

Chapter 304 - An Unexpected But Pleasant Surprise

May would never have thought that by the time she was about to set foot on the road back to Border Town, her heart would once again be filled with so much expectation.

The woods along the Redwater River had already begun to turn yellow, and the breeze blowing directly in one's face brought along a trace of chill. The waves of the shimmering river were rolling under her feet, and from time to time she was able to see the fallen tree leaves floating past the side of the ship.

Now, without all of the anxiety and restlessness she had felt on her last trip, the exuberant surrounding autumn landscape seemed like it was something which came out of a poem or painting.

“Miss May,” a voice, full of respect, came from behind. “Your play of the ‘Witch Diary’, is it true that His Highness wrote the play for you personally?”

When May turned around, she saw that a group of actresses had gathered behind her, the person standing in front looked at her with a tense expression. She recalled that this one's name was ‘Swallow’.

“Aha, sorry,” Irene waved at her, then bowed and said with an apologizing smile. “I wasn't able to answer this question. So without any better option I had to let them come and ask you.”

This fool... May thought and gave her a supercilious look. If it had been her from the past, she would have only dumped them with a sneer. But now, after having spent so much time together with Irene her patience had unexpectedly grown stronger day by day, and thus she dared to answer, “No, His Highness didn’t write it for me. Rather it was the City Hall’s Minister of Education, Lady Scroll who had written the Witch Diary.”

“Uh, is that so?” Swallow blinked in wonder, “At the time you argued with Bella, we all thought it was the truth.”

“His Highness wrote it personally” and, “His Highness wrote it personally for me”, the meaning of those two wordings were poles apart, how could these people grasp the first half of the sentence, but totally dismiss the second half? Thinking of this, she then said to them, “But His Highness endorsed both the script writing and the theatrical performance. Therefore, when Bella ridiculed the script it was indeed equivalent to mocking His Highness. Regarding that point, I haven’t fooled her.”

“Have you ever seen His Royal Highness?”

“I heard that he has the royal family’s mark of long gray hairs and looks extraordinary handsome, is that right?”

“I also heard that he was born with the natural disposition of a romantic and has many lovers!”

“Eh, was it really like that?”

“...” Looking at this group of lively little girls, May couldn’t help but knit her brows. Curse it! I should never have responded to their curiosity.

“Alright, that’s enough, don’t you girls bother Miss May,” Rosia said and began shooing the group of females away while showing an apologizing expression towards May.

“No, harm” she shrugged and then continued to enjoy the scenery along the coastal area. “After all, I was the one who sought out trouble.”

“I... do not understand,” Rosia scratched her head, “Why did you want to take them along when we left? Of the thirty-five people, only two people have stood on stage before, while twenty-six of them have not yet completed any of the courses for their drama classes. According to what you’d previously said, they cannot even be considered as baby chicks. They are still inside their eggshell, yet to hatch... Even if the Lord’s requirements for the play are not so demanding, I’m afraid that even His Highness would find it difficult to accept them. In case you want to retaliate against Bella, you should have tried to court some more experienced supporting actors.”

“I didn’t intend to let all of them perform.”

“Ah?” The other side froze in place for a moment.

“They can read the scripts for a play, isn’t that right?” May asked

laughingly, “Although they still have a long way to go until they can enter the stage, all of them can at least read and write. Don’t tell me you haven’t discovered it yet? His Royal Highness is currently exactly in need of that exact skill.” She paused for a moment, “Do you truly think that His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon loves drama so much, that he recruited us for a play?”

“This...”

“In case it was Lord Petrov, then the answer would be yes. Before he had taken over Longsong Stronghold, he had the habit of going to the theater once a week. However His Highness Roland, apart from viewing the first play of a new theatrical work, he didn’t appear in the town’s square for the rest of the time – so he never promoted the drama for his own enjoyment. Instead, he intends to spread his views to the masses through the drama.” May paused, before going on to say, “Compared to the first shows, which emphasized resisting oppression and the message that witches aren’t evil, the new play, ‘The Dawn of a New Era’ and ‘New City’ have moved towards recruiting people, and ‘one becoming rich through one’s own efforts’ as the message. I’m merely following along with his idea and using the small amount of power I currently have.”

“So, it was originally like this. I never thought about that...” Rosia seemed to be speechless.

“To polish and refine the script for a play, in addition to putting yourself into the character you are playing, it is also important to try and understand the overall story as much as possible if you want to express its true meaning. This is also a quality that a good

actor needs to possess.”

“Yes, thank you for your guidance!” She bowed.

“Be at ease,” May said as she showed her a reassuring smile, “Even in the case that you don’t want to perform any longer, you should still be able to find a pretty good job inside Border Town. Maybe you can enter the City Hall and become an administrative officer. After all, His Highness does not require you to have any sort of status, and he also doesn’t look at your family background. This road would be much easier than going on stage.”

When the vessel arrived at the town, May saw Ferlin Eltek waiting to greet them at the pier.

Naturally, he was here to see Irene.

When she saw the girl dash forward and happily throw herself in his arms, she could only gently sigh.

“Isn’t that man Morning Light?”

“He hadn’t been exiled by His Royal Highness ...”

“The first knight of the Western Territory is magnificent” Swallow said, “I thought he and the theater star would be -“

“Who’s talking such nonsense,” May’s cold voice made everyone suddenly close their mouths. “Hurry up with your luggage and disembark. Gheit and Rosia will take you to the City Hall so that you can register your identity. Everything else will be arranged by them.”

“Yes,” came everyone’s respectful reply.

Walking down the pier, Ferlin, with his arm around his wife, came over to greet her, and spoke to her, “Miss May, Irene just told me about the clash in the theater. Thank you for the kindness you showed her.”

“There is no need for you to thank me,” May couldn’t accept it, “Even though it looked like the other party was looking for trouble with her, but in fact, their target was me.”

“Even so, I still want to thank you.” The Knight laughed brightly and continued to say, “If it weren’t for you stepping forward, she would have cried right on the spot.”

After the two had left, May curled her lips and alone she began carrying her luggage toward the residential district.

Although she had already let go of her feelings, but seeing such a scene still had her feeling some regret. Furthermore, that familiar figure also did not appear, which was contrary to the vow in his letter that he would be waiting for her with a pleasant surprise.

Well, the other side, after all, is an important man to His Highness. Unlike Morning Light who can walk around as he wishes, right?

Back home, May put away her luggage and was hit by a sense of relaxation that she hadn't felt for quite a long time. She took a long breath, took out the white wine from the cupboard and was about to pour herself a drink when a knocking sound came from the door.

When she opened the door, Carter Lannis' awe-inspiring figure appeared before her.

"I did not expect you to be half an hour early," he wiped the sweat from his forehead. "The moment I heard that the boat from Longsong Stronghold has arrived, I immediately rushed over from the barracks."

I don't know why, I definitely didn't catch sight of him at the pier, and he obviously didn't go to receive me, but the moment I see him, my mood immediately lifts up, "Do you want to drink a cup?"

"No, I still have to work this afternoon," Carter waved his hand.

"Well," she nodded, "The matters of His Highness are more important."

“I came because I want to give you a present,” The Chief Knight took a white wooden box from his pocket and handed it to her.

“Is this the latest product of the convenience market?” May asked full of curiosity as she took the wooden box. When she opened the lid, she saw a yellow-orange ring quietly stand at the bottom of the box. Its top was inlaid with a bright and transparent stone, it reflected the autumn sunlight falling through the window with a colorful light.

There is no doubt that this ring is worth a lot of money, which makes it unlikely for it to be a selling item for the convenience market. And when nobles give a ring, it means... she couldn't help but cover her mouth.

“Miss May, are you willing to marry me?” Carter asked her earnestly.

Chapter 305 - Chemical Breakthrough

Four days had already passed since the witches, and the First Army had set off, according to the plan, they should arrive at the outskirts of Silver City by tomorrow afternoon.

Equipped with Honey's flying messengers, Roland received letters sent by the team every day; the letters were from Iron Axe, Anna, and Nightingale. Even though they weren't as fast as mobile phones, it was basically the same as a wireless telegraphing. In case there were several winged messengers on the same road, and if there existed birds who would always go to and from the same two places, it might have the same effect as text messaging.

In the absence of Nightingale, the Chief Knight took over the responsibility of defending the castle. However, Roland couldn't understand why Carter always wore a happy expression these days; it seems like he's encountered something especially pleasing these past few days. Could it be, that returning to his former task and acting as my personal guard is something that's worth being so happy about?

He shook his head and focused his attention back on the report from his Minister of Construction, Karl van Bate.

With the help of the witches from Sleeping Island, Border Town's construction projects were progressing at an amazingly rapid pace these past few months.

First, there was the steel bridge across the Redwater River which

had been successfully completed – compared to the traditional stone bridges and wooden bridges, the structure of the steel bridge had been made in advance, only afterwards had it been hoisted into place. The two floating islands Lotus had raised within the river course had further simplified the former difficult task and also shortened the time needed to construct the main bridge to an amazing one month's time.

Although, when one looked at it with eyes of a person in the future, the bridge did indeed seem short and narrow, and the architecture simple and crude, the theoretical capacity very low, turning it into a project which was purely a waste of material, but within this era it could be regarded as a magnificent super bridge. Its total length carrying on for more than 100 meters, the bridge's surface was smooth and offered enough space for two carriages to move side by side. Furthermore, even its lowest part still met the requirements to let an up-river sailboat pass through, something which a cumbersome stone bridge could never accomplish.

Secondly, Lotus had also completed the construction of the new city wall. Those walls, made purely out of earth, had increased the town's area by more than two times. If they'd been placed in a modern area, the original town would be considered the veritable "inner city"; Roland however, was more inclined towards the two-ring system. Perhaps someday in the future this place could expand into a giant city which even had seven rings, and could then be formally crowned as the imperial capital.

Lastly, regarding the construction of the Kingdom Avenue, Lotus had already leveled out some of the Impassable Mountain Range's extensions, so now the road could go straight through instead of going around which had thus significantly reduced the overall

length of the journey.

“Your Highness, what do you want Lotus to construct next?” Karl asked after he reported on the progress.

Roland was able to tell that he was brimming with admiration for her ability to transform the terrain, because, not only had he proposed that she be integrated into the Ministry of Construction, he’d even put forth a request to appoint her as the vice minister.

“Well...” Roland was also already thinking about this question. There were three major construction projects he wanted to implement next.

The first was the sea port project: Looking for small openings in the southern mountain ridge before caving in a path to the beach was a task he would have to rely on Lotus to achieve. Once they completed the transformation, the Western Territory would gain access to a seaward harbor.

The second project was the residential expansion: Although City Hall had invested a lot of the workforce and financial resources to step up the construction of residential quarters, with winter soon to approach, by now there were nearly three thousand people who would be unable to live in a warm brick house. Nowadays, erecting wooden sheds and simple shelters simply couldn’t meet the requirements to resist the cold, so they needed a group of cave rooms with thick walls and [kangs](#) if they wanted to solve this problem.

The third point was to set up a dock: If he wanted to produce shallow water gunboats, he first had to arrange for a large dock, which at the same time would also affect the passage of the Redwater River. Roland intended to reduce the height of the riverbank on the western side of Border Town, to form a dry dock and install a lift gate at the side of the Redwater River so that they can control the water intake and runoff. The scale of the necessary earthwork was immense, and he would also have to rely on Lotus' ability to complete it.

After considering for a moment, he finally decided to place the residential expansion as the first priority. Since they had invited the refugees from the Eastern Region to Border Town, they were going to have to take responsibility and provide them with the basic necessities of life. If they were to freeze or starved to death, then, not only would it be a loss for the Western Territory, but it would also reduce the people's attachment toward this place.

“So where is the place we should build the temporary residences?” Karl asked.

“The best place would be at the place of the current serf shantytown,” Roland glanced at the map, “That place is far from the defense line of the city wall, they can also use the cover there to protect themselves from the wind coming from the Impassable Mountains.”

After the Minister of Construction left the room, Roland had just planned to take a short nap in his chair when Kyle Sichi arrived at the door.

“Your Highness, the large-scale acid production method you have requested, has been successfully developed.”

Hearing this sentence dispelled Roland’s weariness immediately. He showed a smiling expression on receiving such a pleasant surprise, Roland stood up and said: “Really? Take me to see it.”

When their group came to the laboratory at the Redwater River, he saw a few gray jars and a kiln set up beside laboratory No. five. Each jar was the height of two people and had a pipeline connected to the top, which had a smooth shape; which had clearly been cut out by Anna.

“I pay my respect to you, Your Highness,” a very young looking man said toward Roland and bowed.

“I presume you’re Chavez?” Although he had already learned about the several alchemist apprentices and outstanding alchemist that Kyle had brought from Redwater City, today was still the first time that he saw the other’s appearance.

“You even remember my name,” Chavez said astonished.

“Mr. Sichi has mentioned you plenty of times before,” Roland explained and patted his shoulder in encouragement, “Keep up the good work.” Then, looking over to the Chief Alchemist he asked, “How will this thing produce acid?”

Kyle stroked his beard and said with a smile, “The successful

manufacture is entirely according to a derivation of an equation of the ‘Elementary Chemistry’. You see those kilns, the purified sulfur will burn in the kiln, and through further heating the gas produced will pass through the pipes and into a lead jar.”

“Are all those devices made of lead?”

“That’s right; only lead can resist acid’s corrosion.” Kyle nodded. “The nitro-sulphuric acid will unceasingly sprinkle down from the lead pipe at the top of the jar, and, together with the hot sulfur dioxide below, the heated nitric acid will decompose into nitrogen oxide. Finally, the water and sulfur dioxide together will generate a sulfuric acid solution. This solution will flow out of a hole at the bottom – the smart thing about this reaction is that nitrogen oxide only acts as oxygen carriers, but by itself it can’t be consumed. Therefore, the amount of nitric acids used is small, and once the reaction has started up, it can carry on working continuously!”

“How is the output?” Roland asked while agitatedly patting against a lead jar. Functioning large-scale acid production was the premise needed for mass production of smokeless gunpowder. As long as he could solve this problem, there was hope for the rise of a new generation of weapons and ammunition.

“This is the fourth device I’ve tested, the daily output may be as much as the weight of using the laboratory’s dry distillation method for an entire week.” the Chief Alchemist proudly said, “Because it is a testing device, the volume isn’t large. However, the capacity could be further improved, if you could build lead jars with a larger capacity.

“That’s good news,” Roland said laughingly, “Wait until Miss Anna comes back, and you can set up a larger acid plant right away. If the lead isn’t enough, you can use iron instead, Miss Soraya’s coating can make it resistant against the corrosion of the acid.

Kyle nodded in agreement, but his next sentence made the bright smile on the Prince’s face turn stiff.

“Now, that I accomplished the large-scale acid production and all the five laboratories are also filled with apprentices, Your Highness, can you reward me with the ‘Intermediate Chemistry’ like you’ve promised?”

Chapter 306 - Inside The Garden

Scroll stood behind His Highness Roland, attentively watching as he wrote out the manuscript. Autumn sunshine was falling in through the window onto her back, which made it feel like her whole body was being bathed in warmth.

“Ah, in addition to electronic gains and losses, what further content ah... online class, very urgent.” From time to time the Prince would write something onto the paper and then began to lean his forehead on his hands while he pondered and said some difficult to understand nonsense. At first, Scroll was a little worried about the Prince’s health, but later on she discovered, that this was His Highness’ normal state when he was trying to recall his ‘knowledge’.

Merely that today’s symptoms seemed to be much more severe than ever before.

Unfortunately, I cannot help him... Scroll lightly sighed, if there was a witch who could help him in this regard, I am afraid there is only one, Anna. She had already noted down all the content of the previous books His Highness had written in her brain – but it was merely noted down, nothing more. The past knowledge about those math and natural principles was something much deeper, just reading it is already enough to make people’s head turn muddle-headed, no wonder His Royal Highness feels so embarrassed.

“How about, ending it here for today?” Scroll couldn’t stand it any longer and so she opened her mouth.

Roland decided to give up and put down his pen, leaning his back against the chair then said, “I really envy you for your highly retentive memory. If I could be like you, why would I ever need to worry about exams? I would have been admitted to a famous school and walked to the pinnacle of life.”

She automatically ignored the other's later half of words as nonsense, “Your Royal Highness did they also demand you take those exams at the palace?”

“Yes ah, or how to separate which prince is more outstanding than the others,” he mumbled to himself.

“In fact, sometimes it is not good to remember everything,” Scroll said with a smile. “For example, bad experiences, or the times when you felt deeply hurt or sad, or when you are unable to forget when your life was still happy.”

At the time when she lived in the Seawind Region, due to her identity of being poor, she had to suffer bullying and beatings countless times already. Until today, she could clearly remember the location of every hit, the faces of the perpetrators twisted in anger, and the pain of each kick. Only after finding shelter by the old captain with the broken leg did her life become slightly better. In fact, living in slums like places, with each of them pillaging, fighting, and killing each other, was not much different from freezing or starving to death.

For a long time, she had hated herself very much, why were all

her suffering still vivid in her mind. Because the memory of those scenes was still so clear, the nightmares she suffered during the nights, were repetitions of her unbearable past. Later on, during her day of adulthood, when she awakened her branch ability “Magic Book”, she finally understood that her extraordinary memory was actually something that came along with her identity as a witch.

Probably Roland could guess what she wanted to say, so he revealed an apologizing smile and said, “You might be right.”

Scroll suddenly felt warmth flowing through her heart.

There were only very few people who cared about a witch’s thoughts, not to mention, this person was even an illustrious member of the royal family.

“It doesn’t matter, those times have already passed, Your Highness.”

Roland Wimbledon, compared with other nobles she had seen... no, he was very different compared to all of the people she had met. He possessed a lot of learned knowledge, but all day long he only thought about how he could teach it to other people; his identity was that of a noble, however he didn’t reject people that were below his rank; he enjoyed the praise of the crowd, he could act recklessly, but this was not everything to him, instead, he also took care of other people’s feelings.

A desolate and impoverished town had undergone earth-shaking

changes within one year. The freedom and peace that witches had longed for, was actually granted to them by His Highness Roland. If she hadn't personally experienced it, she would never have believed that there could exist such a ruler in the world.

Nowadays, Scroll had discovered that her own way of thinking had undergone some changes. Before this she hadn't approved of His Highness wanting to take a witch as his wife at all, but now she felt that regardless of who His Royal Highness married, he would take over the throne of Graycastle. He wasn't like the others who kept with the routine of favoring those power-hungry and corrupt nobles, rather, he preferred to make a better life for his people.

She faintly felt that this surge of strength seemed to be stronger than any previous force..

"Ah, let it be," all of a sudden Roland said while rubbing his head, "This is the last page."

"Will you continue to record tomorrow?"

"No, just give it to him like this. Together with the physics teaching material, it should be enough for him to study for a while." His Royal Highness took a new paper and quickly wrote down a few characters on it before he continued, "After all, it is a copy of a book from 'ancient times', so it should be normal to be missing most of it, right?"

Scroll took the paper and saw the name of the book – "Intermediate Chemistry (Remnant)".

After finishing her memorizing task, Scroll left the office and was preparing to go back to the City Hall when the magnificent scenery of the back garden attracted her attention.

After the completion of the castle wall expansion, the castle's backyard had almost reached the size of the town square. And now, less than a week after, it was already covered by all kinds of plants. There was no doubt that this must be a masterpiece of Leaves.

Scroll followed the pass formed by two rows of olive trees, step by step going towards the depths of the garden. After passing by a row of dense sugar cane, she saw Leaves sitting on the shore of a pond.

The other side hadn't bound her hair into the braided pigtails she usually wore during the daytime, instead, today she had draped her head full of green long hair over one shoulder. Her spotless white feet were lightly splashing around within the water, she was holding some wheat grains in her hands, and from time to time she would throw them towards the fishes swimming around her feet. Unable to stop herself from chuckling out loud, whenever one of those fishes approached her and gently brushed against her toes.

"Are your feet completely healed?" Scroll asked as she sat next to her.

"Oh, it's you Teacher Scroll," she blinked for a moment in

confusion, then nodded happily and said. “Yes, Miss Nana has restored them to their original form. Like this, I finally don’t need to endure the pain in my toes during winter.”

“Are all these plants you planted in the garden your improved versions?”

“Well,” Leaves said as she began to point happily towards each of them, “Over there is the vine shed, here are the fruit trees, and there are the crops. I also asked His Royal Highness to bring me a batch of compost, just so that I could test the absorption quality of the new crops. In addition, there are dozens of bird’s nest in the fruit trees, and the messengers Honey raised are all sleeping on top of the trees.”

Scroll lovingly stroke her hair and said, “I thought you would be the first witch of the Witch Alliance to evolve. After all, when we were within the Impassable Mountain Range, the ability you displayed wasn’t below that of Cara.”

“His Royal Highness said that the possibility to evolve one’s ability comes along with the understanding of our ability. Plant cells do indeed make people feel they are unfathomable is what I’ve thought long ago, but now I think that at the root of it they are all the same. You see, a bundle of tiny grass when fused together can change into flexible vines, but if they were different, how could something like that ever be possible?”

Scroll opened her mouth, but she didn’t know whether she should comfort her or agree with her, so finally, she said: “Your ability, even without evolving, can already do so much for His

Highness.”

“I feel that it is not far away from me,” Leaves said, shaking her head, while her eyes were filled with bright light, “Animals are living, plants are living, and even several parts of them together are living as well... Birds need trees to build a nest, while their droppings once again bring nourishment to the trees. A forest can provide a living being with everything its needs while at the same time the forest extends due to the provided moisture of all living things.” She paused, “Look at this garden. I think I already found a way to move forward.”

Chapter 307 - Death From The Sky

The hot air balloon was flying two thousand meters above ground, which was something Lightning had measured by flying vertically up towards the sky.

When she raised her head, it seemed as if the clouds she could see were almost within reach, looking like a loose cotton. However, if she really wanted to touch them, she would still have to fly a few hundred meters or so further up.

The whole hot air balloon was painted with blue and white patches, which from a distance, gave it the exactly same appearance as the sky. Furthermore, they themselves had also put on camouflage clothing, the same was even true for “Easterly Wind 1”. According to His Highness’ requirements, it was important that this surprise attack was sudden and came from under cover. Therefore, the First Army had even gotten off the boat before they reached Silver City’s pier and walked to the back of the nearby mountain.

Under Sylvie’s surveillance, the team was able to avoid all eyes, not drawing anybody’s attention from beginning to end. After they finished setting up camp, Cloud Gazer slowly took off, they would carry out the bombing mission on the next day.

After spending one week on the street, today was the beginning of the first month of autumn.

Due to the insufficient possibilities to observe from inside the

basket, Maggie flew out in front of the balloon like a white shadow, taking over the responsibilities for directing and investigating their route. Even from such a high altitude, after changing into a white-tailed eagle, she was quickly able to identify the roads connecting the towns and the carriages that was traveling on them – at this point, the eagle's eyes were much better than an observation mirror.

Fortunately, the other side cannot change the place at which the bomb will drop, Lightning thought, otherwise I really wouldn't have anything to do.

“Are you tired?” Anna asked, leaning over the side of the basket, “Come in and take a rest, we won't come across any Devil here anyway.”

The little girl shook her head, “At this speed, I can fly the whole day long.”

“Aren't you a little nervous?” Wendy asked, as she came and leaned over the side.

“I'm not,” she said, curling her lips, “I have practiced the course of event many times, and the palace is so big, it'll be impossible for me to miss.”

“Is that so?” Wendy smiled. “Anyway, do not try to be brave, His Highness said that the most important thing is our safety. Also.... the incident at the Devil's Town during the investigation mission wasn't your fault.”

“What, I...”

Wendy interrupted her in a gentle tone, “Anyone could see that you’ve been frustrated these last few days, but you weren’t too cowardly to fight, rather, you just haven’t gained enough battle experience yet. If it had been me in your place, I definitely couldn’t have done any better.”

“Indeed, Nightingale possess reflexes and skills which most of us witches don’t have,” Anna added in comfort. “You might as well come in and have a rest, the amount of magic you will need to adjust the impact point of the bomb won’t be a small amount.”

Hearing the comforting words coming from the two, Lightning sniffed gently, then bowed her head as she entered the basket. Even before she had landed, Wendy had already wrapped her into her bosom, “No one blames you, so you should also not blame yourself, understand?”

“Ok...”

After flying for an entire morning, Maggie flapped her wings and returned to Cloud Gazer to report to the other three, “The King’s City of Graycastle is in front of us, we are almost there, goo.”

Lightning immediately flew out of the basket and lifted the lookout mirror – only to see that it was exactly as His Highness had

said, King's City's city wall was such a grand sight, that it was still clearly visible even from so high up in the sky. It arose from the earth, just like a blue-green colored crooked string as it described the scope of the city. Furthermore, the fingernail-sized white spots in the middle of the gray block seemed especially eye-catching.

According to the first plan, they would first drop leaflets all over King's City before releasing Easterly Wind No.1. But after going through several test runs, they finally had to accept that there was not any possible way for them to control the direction the papers would fall when releasing it from a height of two thousand meters, even if they were to add some extra weight it still wouldn't work. Trying to reduce their altitude however meant they would then easily be discovered, after all, Cloud Gazer's size was just too big. If that was coupled with the stream leaflets dropping from the sky attracting the eyes of the crowd below, it would become very difficult for them to hide.

Therefore, His Royal Highness had decided to cancel the leaflet part in the end. Instead, he had shifted the task to Theo so as to inform the public of the news, that they were the ones who had thrown a bomb at the palace.

Wendy manipulated the airflow so that the basket came to a halt above King's City.

“Everyone ready?”

“Pull up the valve,” Lighting said while nodding.

Then, she could only hear a loud humming sound as the heavy bomb started moving away from the basket, falling straight down to the ground. As the weight suddenly reduced, the hot air balloon began to fly upwards.

Regarding the following step, she had already knew them by heart for a long time.

Under the airflow caused from it dropping down, the parachute at the end of Easterly Wind No. 1 opened, and so Lightning could easily catch up with the bomb, she then began correcting its trajectory a little at a time.

The witches of the Witch Union weren't unfamiliar with King's City at all. When they'd moved westwards on their journey to the Holy Mountain, they had hidden themselves within the city's slums for several months. One of the reasons for this was to gather food and another was to attract new blood, during which time Soraya and Echo had come to join the Witch Cooperation Association. Although Lightning hadn't experienced it herself, but she had often listened to them speaking about this. Compared to other cities, King's City was very strict in implementing witch hunts, on top of the flight of steps at the outer city's public square, witches would be executed almost every month. As a result, they had stayed there for the shortest amount time, because with every day that passed, they would have to suffer the pain of seeing another sister pass away.

Therefore, Lightning had no favorable impression of this bustling capital city. If she could end the rule of the person responsible for it by dropping a bomb on top of their head, she

would be glad to do so. If Roland was the one ruling the Kingdom of Graycastle, all those tragedies would never have happened, isn't that right?

She now had the chance to correct this error.

Under the whistling sound of the wind, the scene below continued to expand, and soon, the details of the palace at the middle of the inner city started becoming clear to Lightning's eyes.

Compared to the size of the living places of the commoners, the palace was many times larger – its main buildings were made up of a dome, a banquet hall, and a tall castle tower. The rest were auxiliary buildings such as stables, barracks, warehouses and so on. Taking into account the steep walls of the castle, the roof's structure was very complex, and not very usable for the impact detonator, thus His Highness had decided that the imperial palace's hall would be the target of the attack.

As the height dropped sharply, the parachute quickly reached the point of detachment. Lightning pulled the release mechanism, and let the parachute separate from the bomb, then picked it up and quickly began rising towards the sky.

Before their departure, Prince Roland had repeatedly told her that she had to rise high enough and reach a safe position before the bomb hit. By no means should she ever turn around or go and take a look at the explosion, but the young girl was still tempted by her curiosity, and was unable to restrain the impulse to lower her head.

Only to see a dazzling flash of light rise from the top of the hall and rapidly expand in all direction.

The incandescent light quickly turned into a bright orange-red, only to be followed by a rolling cloud of smoke and dust which slowly faded out. This process lasted only one instant before suddenly an ear-splitting sound of an explosion bombarded her ears, almost making her lose her balance.

Lighting really wasn't inexperienced with the booming sound of artillery barrage on a battlefield, but compared to those terrible weapons which could shoot iron balls, the sound of Easterly Wind No.1's explosion would be ten times louder!

Smoke spurt out of the windows and between the pillars of the palace hall, engulfing the surrounding garden and gallery. Soon, several cracks appeared on the round dome which had been at the center of the impact.

Lightning couldn't help but stop and hold her breath as she took in the last moments of the hall.

Those countless black cracks wantonly flowed in all direction like ink, and instantly covered the entire roof. Then, as the roof was no longer able to support itself, it came crashing down, and raised an even stronger cloud of smoke.

Under Easterly Wind No.1's amazing might, the palace hall finally collapsed.

Chapter 308 - Fear

In recent days, Theo had kept in daily contact with Prince Roland.

In spite of the many incredible things he had seen during the last year he had worked for His Royal Highness, this new order felt a bit inconceivable and had also left him feeling... puzzled.

Announce the attack on the imperial palace as Roland Wimbledon's punishment on Timothy Wimbledon?

At the time the militia which had attacked the Western Territory returned to King's City, he had naturally also heard of the "warning" that they had brought along with them. However, Theo had merely thought that it was His Highness' bluff, or perhaps a plan to threaten the east and strike the west – getting Timothy to increase the defenses while he sent out troops to attack other cities. Just like Garcia had done, going out to loot one of the enemy's cities before the approaching winter.

But the following orders sent from Border Town gave him the impression that he'd been mistaken. In fact, it seemed that His Highness really did intend to attack King's City, and had thus asked him to be ready to spread some propaganda. This latest command had made it clear that the attack would be launched on the first day of autumn, at exactly the same time as announced in the "warning" message.

Taking a look at this sentence, "The attack on the imperial palace

could be considered as punishment”, in other words, His Highness would forcefully enter the King’s City inner city – but how could that be possible? King’s City possessed Graycastle’s mightiest city walls, with a thickness that could accommodate two houses set side by side, which even for His Highness’s artillery would be difficult to destroy. Furthermore, with the kingdom’s best Knights, personal guards, as well as the enlisted militia as defenders, it would be hard to set even one step into the city without already having an army that was more than ten thousand people strong.

Even using witches to initiate surprise attacks would have a similar outcome. Within the imperial palace there were as many God’s Stone of Retaliation as there were hairs on an ox. In addition, in the palace’s grand hall and in the other parts of the palace all had giant God’s Stones of Retaliation installed in them. So as soon as a witch set even one foot inside the room, she would immediately be stripped of all her powers. This was also the reason why Timothy could hunt and kill witches wantonly while being fearless of any retaliation – wishing to ever assassinate a member of the royal family was simply an unattainable dream.

Furthermore, even if there was a method, it still held some hidden dangers to it. If Timothy Wimbledon really was to die under a witch’s hand, most likely the Church would be the party to receive the greatest benefit... With only a little bit of guidance, they could start to claim that the 4th Prince, a pawn of the Devil’s minions would sit on the throne, which would result in all of the other nobles unifying against him. But Theo believed that a person like His Royal Highness already possessed enough intelligence to see hidden dangers such as that.

So, in the end, how will His Highness get into and attack the inner city?

“Sir, what kind of instruction do you have for me to come over?” Opening the half-closed door, Hill Fawkes walked into the living room.

“We are waiting for a new order,” Theo said and spread out his hands, “So go and take a seat first.”

“...Yes.”

Theo could only smile helplessly when he saw the flabbergasted expression on the former member of the acrobatic group. Usually he would only inform these people when he had received precise orders; but this time, it would be inconvenient for him to inform them of His Highness’ mission ahead of time – in case they were unable to launch the attack on the imperial palace, this seemingly absurd instruction could easily reduce the other party’s level of trust.

But on the contrary, if His Royal Highness was able to be true to his claim it would become an unprecedented shock to them, which could also greatly enhance the confidence of these people – especially if they could see with their own eyes that His Highness was able to shake Timothy’s throne even from a thousand miles away, and thus cause a real threat to the throne. Compared to spreading propaganda from mouth to mouth, this kind of action would be several times more effective.

So, Theo chose to go with a compromise and called Hill over to the house in the inner city before waiting for His Highness to fulfill his warning. If they were successful, it would naturally be to everyone's delight, but if they failed, he just had to lie and say that the messenger had been delayed during the journey.

"Have some tea," Theo offered laughingly, "Don't always show your doubt all over your face, as an intelligence officer the most important thing is –"

"To mask yourself, Sir." He took the cup in response, "Oh, by the way. Recently there have been much more patrols visible on the streets, even the guards defending the city wall have been doubled. Don't tell me... do these maneuvers have something to do with His Highness' order?"

"Indeed, Timothy –"

Just half of Theo's words had left his mouth, as a sudden clap of thunder from above rolled over the mansion. A sound that was so loud and clear that the glass in the windows began to tremble. At the same time, the ground also began to faintly shake with distinct tremors for a short duration. As he was caught off guard, Hill's hands began to shake, the teacup fell to the ground, breaking into several pieces.

"I'm sorry, Sir... But," Hill stuttered stupefied, "This is... what just happened?"

"Come with me," Theo ordered, wearing an earnest expression.

The moment they ran out of the residence and entered the garden, their gazes were immediately attracted to a pillar of black smoke that was rising from the palace. Apparently, that was where the thunder had come from. Theo had experienced when cannons and firearms released their might, he naturally knew that only the alchemist's fine powder could give rise to this sound of heaven's anger. What's more, such a violent tremor was unlike anything that an artillery bombardment could have caused. Instead, it was more like those explosive packages they had originally used to deal with the heavy armored demonic beasts.

Hill stood beside him, his mouth opened wide and unable to believe what his eyes were telling him. "Could it be that His Highness' declared warning was real?"

"That's right," Theo was finally able to control his racing heart, he turned, pretending to be profound as he stated, "This is the new order His Highness wants me to give you."

Timothy could only look on with an ashen face as the chandelier fell in front of his eyes, and was struck speechless for a long time.

"Your Majesty, keke... Are you alright, Sire?" The Imperial Prime Minister said coughingly from somewhere from within the dust that had flew up and was filling the whole sky. "What the hell just happen outside?"

Timothy didn't answer, he merely felt a terrible pain in his

throat. The chandelier just now had fallen on top of a silver armored knight. At that time, the man had still been in the process of giving a report of the refugees that were enlisting, yet his neck had been broken by the chandelier. If I had gone one step further, I am afraid I would...

Thinking until here, all the hair on his back stood up straight.

“Is this an earthquake?” The Finance Minister said, still locked in a panicked state, “We have to get out of the castle and reach an open place.”

“That’s right Your Majesty, it isn’t safe here!”

“Everyone shut up!” Timothy shouted. The moment he opened his mouth however, he discovered that his voice had turned hoarse, becoming difficult to understand, as if he was speaking while pinching his own throat, “Sir Weimar, take me to the basement immediately!”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Although he looked a bit nervous but compared to the performance of several other ministers, he could still be regarded as very calm. He immediately walked over and helped Timothy up, then they walked together the stairs leading further down.

Along the way, the new king saw that the aisle was covered with pieces of shattered glass and also that the blue dome of heaven behind the damaged windows had ceased to exist. In the midst of the still soaring smoke and dust, only a few pillars from this

former magnificent building could still be seen. This wasn't caused by an earthquake, but by an explosion caused by a large amount of snow powder!

If I leave the castle now I would undoubtedly step on my own path of doom. Only god knows where Roland has buried snow powder. I'm only safe behind the thick walls of the basement.

Damn it, Timothy thought hateful, how on earth can my brother be in possession of such an alchemic weapon? Could it be, before her departure of Clear Water, Garcia had given him the formula, so that he could use the snow powder to make both sides suffer?

But even then, how was he able to bring the snow powder inside of the palace? Even with the ability of an extraordinary witch it still wouldn't have been possible!

“Take some knights along with you and thoroughly search the whole palace. Especially the sewers, gardens, and warehouses; anywhere that it would be easy to hide snow powder!” Timothy immediately ordered toward Knight Steel Heart after reaching the basement. “If you find any suspicious character, noble or commoner, immediately arrest them. All attendants and servants who enter or leave the palace should be thoroughly searched, none of them can be spared!”

“As you bid, Your Majesty.”

After Sir Weimar had left, the new king discovered that his back was now covered in cold sweat.

Roland has actually done it!

Regardless of how he had done it. Since he could hide the snow powder inside the palace this time, does that mean that he can reach the castle as easily as turning his hand the next time he comes?

“Your position is not as safe as you think, everyone will see that your throne is already crumbling.”

Recalling the words of the warning, Timothy could not help but shudder.

As his anger gradually subsided, he felt fear come rising from the soles of his feet, bit by bit it was taking hold of his heart.

Chapter 309 - The Exploration Of Knowledge

On the second day of autumn Roland finally received a letter from King's City.

Since the letter sent came via a flying messenger, it was most likely written by his personal guard Theo.

Freeing the paper from the bird's claw, Roland stepped over to the window, using the radiant and enchanting sunshine to carefully read through it.

“Because the palace was quickly blocked and no one was allowed to enter or leave, I wasn't able to scout out the damage caused by the explosion. But within the evening almost all of King's City's inhabitants knew of the attack on the palace, whether it be in the pub, the inn or the city squares, wherever people gathered there was only one topic of discussion. Even the death of the former King hadn't caused such a sensational impact. In addition, since you've given a warning beforehand, there are now many people who believe that Timothy has already died from this attack and they believe you will soon start ruling over King's City from there becoming the new king of the Kingdom of Graycastle.”

This paragraph allowed Roland to feel thoroughly relieved – there could be no better news for him than to hear that the bombing mission had been successfully carried out, and that the witches would be safely returning soon.

He made himself a cup of tea before returning to the side of the mahogany table and continuing to read the letter.

“However, according to the collected information, at present, there isn’t any sign of activity from the several big nobles outside King’s City. Furthermore, the royal palace has also responded very quickly, so I speculate that Timothy Wimbledon is still likely to be alive.

“In addition, there are some people who swear that this attack had come from the sky. In the end, there seems to be some residents who’ve witnessed an unremarkable colored object drop from the sky, falling with utmost speed unto the imperial palace. Therefore, I have already come up with an initial plan regarding the task you’ve handed me – if I could actually embellish this matter into heaven’s punishment against the fake King, I think that many of the people will believe it to be the truth.

“Regarding this, the hands under my control are full of enthusiasm. During daytime, they’ve collected information concerning all of Timothy’s tyrannical practices. If this was to be mixed in with the story, it would surely become even more effective. I believe that it won’t even be a month before the street rats spread this news to the ears of all of the citizens.

“In addition, I will continue to closely monitor the movements of the Eastern Barracks. But looking at the current situation, Timothy still doesn’t seem to have come up with any countermeasures to resist the attack, so it seems that he doesn’t have any time to care about anyone else.”

The letter was again not signed at the end. After reaching its end, Roland folded the letter and put it into the drawer before releasing a deep and long breath.

In case Easterly Wind No.1 really has stopped Timothy from dispatching troops, the result would already be very good.

After all, the large number of drugged people consumed during a fight was indeed too wasteful. The later the other side launched its battle of attrition, the more opportunities Roland could get to win over the population.

Roland raised the cup and drank a mouthful of fragrant black tea. For now, the next thing he needed to do was to rest and wait for the witches to return.

It was already several days since he had last seen Anna, and there was also nobody who stole any of the dried fish out of the drawer, all in all, this made him feel a bit uncomfortable.

At this moment, Carter opened the door to the office.

“Your Royal Highness, two fleets have arrived at the pier.”

“Has Margaret’s Chamber of commerce finally arrived? Taking into account the time she had spent on the road, she must have missed a good show... hold on,” Roland stopped for a moment, feeling slightly surprised, “You said there were two fleets?”

“Yes,” Carter said laughingly, “You remember the messenger group you had sent to the Southern Territory to recruit staff? A batch of troops has already come back. The number of refugees that they brought along with them is already enough to crowd the pier to its bursting point. Currently, the City Hall is carrying out your plan and Miss Lily is executing the...”

“Quarantine operation.”

“Ah right, you’re talking about the program to eliminate the existence of plagues or similar threats...” The Chief Knight coughed twice, “This group of people number about four or five hundred people in size.”

“Do they?” Roland couldn’t prevent the corner of his mouth from rising. It seems as if it was just moments ago when we spoke about the possibility of this matter, but now it’s already started to show results. It seems as if the number of temporary houses Lotus needs to prepare has increased yet again, “Let’s go and take a look.”

Kyle Sichi put down the extremely thin remaining section of the “Intermediate Chemistry” while repeatedly muttering, “So that is what it is.”

“Mentor?” Chavez asked anxiously.

Since the time he had received the “Intermediate Chemistry”,

Kyle had been unable to find any sleep within the last two days, almost reading through the whole ancient book overnight. Chavez himself had also taken a few glances at it, but the book's content was too abstruse and much too difficult to understand.

"I'm fine," the Chief Alchemist's voice didn't contain any trace of weariness, instead it appeared as if his spirit was trembling with excitement. Even though the corner of his eyes may have contained some dirt, his two eyes were still bright and full of fire, and looked nothing like a person who had just gone through a sleepless night.

The times when the mentor delved into alchemy they mustn't be easily disturbed, this was a rule which each disciple need to abide by. So, having waited until now, Chavez finally dared to open his mouth and speak, "This book... this disciple doesn't understand what is an atom, and what is an electron?"

"You are already a qualified alchemist, so you mustn't call yourself a disciple. According to His Highness, we are colleagues now." Kyle paused, "As for your question, I do not know how to answer it... In fact, when His Royal Highness Roland gave me the "Intermediate Chemistry", this book was also attached to it.

Chavez looked at another book on the table, on the cover was written: "Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science".

"Sichi... Mentor" he wasn't accustomed to using such a familiar form of address yet, "It looks as if it closely follows alchemy... No, it completely lacks any relation with chemistry."

“I also thought the same,” Kyle said while stroking his beard. He sighed then continued to speak, “However, after reading through a few pages, I discovered that I have actually been totally ignorant of this world.”

“What?” Chaves was stunned. Alchemy is the study of the composition of substance, the essence of elements. If they could be considered as knowing nothing about it, then what difference was there between other people and monkeys?

“I mean the concept behind it,” the Chief Alchemist’s voice was full of excitement... and also satisfaction, “We think that alchemy is just alchemy; that it is the research of scholarly knowledge. We say to ourselves that the sun rising and falling, and the flowers blooming and fading are things which have no relation to us.”

“Isn’t that right?... Those who are good at observing the sun and the stars become astrologers, as for the plants,” Chavez was slightly disgusted, “Only farmers and herbalist would study them.”

“That’s why we know nothing at all,” Kyle shook his head, “From the beginning, this book tried to connect everything together, whether they it be stones, flowers, thunder, or fire, all are made up of the same thing, all follow the same set of rules. Not only does chemistry react according to these rules, even the sun rises and falls and the flowers bloom and fade according to it. This rule is so precise, that as long as the conditions are the same, the result will also always be exactly the same. Chemistry is only a small part of this.”

“.....How can this be?”

“I also find it hard to imagine,” he unfolded the periodic table of elements. “In Intermediate Chemistry, it describes the form of these elements – one big ball surrounded by numerous smaller balls. The big ball decides which kind of element it is, and the number of balls in the outer ring determines the characteristics of the element, and this very list, is arranged according to this law. They’re as neatly lined up as a parade of soldiers. Now, I also fully understand the meaning of His Highness: Why we can, without ever having seen or come into contact with this element, are still able to deduce its properties and reactions. Because even the smallest reaction, like the loss or addition of those small balls, won’t involve any changes to the big ball at all. This is also the reason why elements don’t disappear during a reaction, they will only ever transform.”

For a moment Chavez pondered about what he had heard and then asked, “Do you ... believe it?”

These theories are too misty, and they cannot be verified by the eye, so how are the people who wrote the book able to know of it?

“I do not know, so I cannot answer your previous question,” Kyle said while showing a smile, “But it doesn’t matter whether you believe it or not. The key is that it provides a perspective I have never imagined before... In the end, it allows me to look at it through another door and behind that door, there isn’t only just chemistry.” Speaking until here, his voice came to a stop, “Unfortunately, His Royal Highness wasn’t able to record everything. Perhaps he was unable to understand it himself, so

who knows what he might have missed.”

Chavez wasn't able to comprehend everything he had heard, just like when he had become an apprentice. When he'd first heard the terms used by alchemists' it had been like hearing people speak in another language, and now, he once again had this feeling.

But he wasn't worried, as long as he followed his mentor, he would be able to learn this so-called theory of “all living things are interconnected.” Compared to the Chief Alchemist, the thing he lacked the most now, was time.

After a moment of silence, Chavez asked, “But, why did His Highness use different colors for the names of the books?”

Showing an expression of surprise the Chief Alchemist let out a cry, “Ah.” Then he said, “This... is something I'd actually ignored. Could it be that he'd casually used them?” But he quickly shook his head, “No, if they were colored black and red it could be the case. But these types of colors are especially difficult to make, it is unlikely to be unintentional. In other words, His Highness deliberately used them?”

“Elementary Chemistry” was blue, “Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science” was also blue, “Elementary Mathematics” was green, and “Intermediated Chemistry (Remnants)” was written with purple paint. It didn't stand out when you looked at each of them alone, but if placed together, it was particularly eye-catching.

“Probably for appearance sake?” Chavez guessed.

Chapter 310 - The Purified

Mayne stood on top of an arched hillside, overlooking the city ahead of him from a distance.

Last time, Wolfsheart city's walls had looked far different from what it looked like now – the walls were built with stones from the Kingdom of Eternal Winter appearing clean and white, just like the teeth of a newborn wolf. However, within just three months' time, its appearance had been completely changed. Breakages had been filled with the local black boulders and the gaps which they couldn't mend in time had been blocked with wooden palisades, the blood-soaked stone had lost its pure white color, and turned into a reddish brown instead.

Looking from the distance, the current walls looked rough and seemed to be covered with dirt, like wolf teeth that had experienced years of wind and frost. Compared with its prior appearance, they now looked more like the teeth of a ravening predator – like the time when they were tearing their prey apart, which was the most fearsome sight to humans.

The Church's army had set up their camp about 2,5 miles outside of Wolfsheart City. In order to prevent the former Queen of Clear Water from raiding the Old Holy City, they hadn't brought along the same size as last time. The Army of Judges and the baggage teams were both around five thousand people, while the God's Punishment Army had a total of nearly eight hundred or so. However, with their secret siege weapon and the purified, Mayne had full confidence that they would be able to clear out this nest of wolves.

“Your Excellency, the Siege Beast is in place and ready to attack.”
A priest came to the top of the hill to report to him.

“What’s the status of the Purified who are controlling it?”

“They are also prepared to launch.”

Mayen lifted the observation mirror and looked toward the direction of the ‘Siege Beast’ – only to see two fearsome steel beasts lying within the farmland two miles away from the city walls, both sides were surrounded with obstruction boards and had a grass covered roof over them. If you didn’t take a careful look, it would be difficult to detect this ferocious weapon with its uncanny shape.

Moving his line of sight forward, he saw a lineup of the God’s Punishment Army. These were the transformed soldiers of the Church’s most devoted believers, standing straight in the autumn wind, all of them motionless. Only when the enemy fought against them would they really be able to understand just how terrifyingly powerful these extraordinary warriors were. Unfortunately, they couldn’t act autonomously and would only act according to the orders issued by the commander during battle. However, the commander has never appeared publicly in the Church, and during battle would fight from within the ranks, disguised as a member of the God’s Punishment Army. So, except for the three Archbishops and the Pope, there was no one who knew his true identity.

“Very good,” Mayne said as he nodded in satisfaction. “Return to your position and wait for the attack horn to sound.”

“Yes, Your Excellency.”

His next task was to meet with the Purifieds that the Pope had sent.

When he thought of those two witches, he could not help but frown, they were as different as black and white compared to the other witches of the Church, even during the march to fight they were still carrying on with their own things. If they were one of his own Purifieds, they would already have been punished with a flogging, but the position of these two and Archbishop Mayne were on equal footing, so he wasn't allowed to direct them. His Holiness had only sent these two Purifieds to 'provide assistance' during the battle, not to 'obey' his orders.

But he also knew, if he wanted to completely eradicate all of the hidden dangers he was going to have to depend on their powers.

The Archbishop went down the hill and stopped in front of a tent outside the camp. But when he opened the curtain, the bedstraws were unsurprisingly empty.

“Zero and Isabella?” He asked the judge standing at the entrance.

“The two Ladies are currently interrogating the captives, they should be at the east side of the camp now,” the judge said. “There is a flat open space there, you can see it immediately when you get there. Or do you want me to go and call them back?”

If it would be enough to send you to call them, I wouldn't have needed to come here to begin with. But they are playing with the captives again... aren't they tired of playing? "No, it's alright, I will look for them myself."

He soon found the place the guard had told him of.

Only to see two women stand in the center of a level ground. One of them was leaning forward, her head next to the ears of three prisoners whose hands were tied together, and whispering something to them. The expression on her face was gentle but focused, her white long hair and her robe was dancing in the wind, just like a flawless spirit. The other woman possessed an impressive figure and had a head full of golden curly hair, and from time to time she would release a sweet-sounding and clear laugh.

"Have the surrounding Judges immediately vacate the area." Mayne instructed his personal guard to send instruction to the Presiding Judge, "The same is true for the people responsible for looking after the captives, tell them that there is no more need for them to look after them."

"As you bid."

At this moment, the blond witch also noted their arrival, she informed her partner and quickly walked over.

“Your Excellency,” the blond witch said while giving a slight bow, “Why did you drive the audience away? The trial was just about to begin.”

“Ms. Isabella,” he nodded back, “The all-out attack on Wolfsheart City is about to begin, so interrogating the prisoners has become meaningless now. Furthermore, these people can’t tell us more than the other spies we’ve caught along the way, and that was only a pathetic amount of news. If possible, I hope you and Zero can immediately rush over to the front line.”

“Don’t worry, since we are already here, we couldn’t let such an important enemy just walk away,” Isabella said while spreading out her hands. “As for the trial... there is nothing I can do to stop her. How about, you can just act as the audience, it won’t take them that long anyway.”

“The same as before?”

“Well, the rules will be basically the same,” she laughed, “Zero really likes this kind of game.”

“If it’s like that then quickly get started.” Damn it! Even though Mayne’s face became expressionless, inwardly he was burning with anger. Speaking of this judgement game, it would be more appropriate to look at it as a cat playing with a mouse. The captives had to escape a predefined range or defeat the witch, only by doing this could they obtain a slim chance of survival – and this chance to live was extremely slim, but the bait was still good enough to lure

out the mouse. It already seemed difficult to achieve, but in fact, it was something they would never be able to reach.

The reason for scattering the Judges who were responsible for safeguarding and monitoring the Purifieds was that the upcoming process couldn't be considered as entirely fair or just. The other's action wasn't in accordance with the behavior of Purified, so seeing this, he was afraid that it might waver their faith in the Church.

Just wait until I take over the position of the Pope, at that time I will have to teach them the importance of obediently following orders.

At this moment, Zero had already freed the prisoners from the ropes and spread out her hands to show that she wasn't wearing any weapon on her body. While in front of the prisoners there laid a sword, a machete, and a light crossbow.

“Come on, fight or run, just follow your hearts,” Zero said with a gentle tone. “Only God can issue a ruling.”

One of them clenched his teeth then suddenly picked up the crossbow from the ground and directly shot an arrow at the Purified. Not even looking whether he had hit, his other hand had already taken hold of the sword as he tried to seize the opportunity to rush forward and chop out horizontally. This whole set of actions were executed in one smooth movement, clearly a skill that was impossible for militia.

However, the captive cut through nothing but empty air. The Purified had simply taken two steps back and easily avoided the surprise attack. When the captive came to a stop and raised his head, he couldn't suppress a short flicker of surprise when he saw that the other was holding the arrow with her teeth, as if she was chewing on a harmless branch.

Zero spit out the arrow, waved at the captive, and with a smile, she said, "Please, carry on."

The captive stared blankly at her, his hands trembling slightly. Mayne could see that all the courage he'd gathered with such difficulty had already left him again, even if the fight were to continue, it would only last for one more exchange.

Sure enough, after hesitating for a moment, the captive raised his head and roared like a wild boar. Then raised his sword and darted toward the unarmed woman.

But this attempt was too stiff, even with closed eyes, Mayne could guess at the result – just within his half a lunar cycle long contact with Zero, Mayne had already become aware that her powers were almost limitless. Even though she wasn't an extraordinary, she still possessed innate battle skills not inferior to them. These skills weren't in her supernatural strength or resistance, but rather in her extremely skillful technique.

Even if she couldn't use any magic, she was still a dreadful enough soldier.

The witch moved her body slightly to the side, easily avoiding the opponent's hack. Then her pair of seemingly fragile hands clamped the prisoner's head, and using his forward momentum, she softly moved it. This slight flick only released a light cracking sound, but as if the other side had suddenly lost all the bones in his body, he immediately became limp and fell to the ground.

She turned her head and looked to the two remaining captives then said, "Now, it's your turn."

Chapter 311 - War Of Mortals (Part 1)

Seeing this scene, one of the other prisoners turned and ran away which caused Zero to look somewhat disappointed.

She turned into a ray of light and entered the fleeing captive's body, who immediately stopped his steps. The captive's eyes turned white, and his body began to undergo strange changes – this wasn't Mayne's first time seeing such a scene, but no matter how often he saw it, he couldn't prevent a chill from arising within his heart.

A dim ray of light burst out from within the captive's body and his body began to twist and deform until finally changed into the very appearance of the Purified who had entered him.

He knew that this wasn't a simple act of replacing and slaughtering, but what exactly happened during this transformation process, Mayne was afraid that only the Pope or the people involved could fully understand.

Zero took a deep breath and went back to the last prisoner.

He was the youngest of three captured spies, probably only fourteen to fifteen years old. His young and inexperienced eyes were filled with shock and fear, unable to accept what had happened just now.

“Now, you're the only one left,” she whispered, “Eyre.”

Hearing these words, the trembling boy who had originally wanted to pick up the machete froze in shock and started to stammer, “H-how...”

“God told me everything. Actually, you were merely a farmer’s child living in the outskirts, but because of the Wolf King’s order, you and the other village people were forced to move into the city, and became responsible for repairing the city walls, creating the military supplies, transporting the army’s provision and so on. In other words, forced labor. Instead of letting you go because of your young age, they rather decided to recruit you into the investigation troops. In reality they’ve planned for you to emerge and perish on your own,” she reached out and touched his cheeks, “The best evidence for this is that at the time you sent back the intelligence about the large military operation of the Church, the captain of the guards didn’t even let you enter the camp. Instead, after listening to your report he immediately sent you back to us, right?”

“I...” Eyre opened his mouth, but couldn’t find any words.

“Of course, they couldn’t let you enter, because your family had already ceased to exist. Your parents were accepted, while your brother was the same as you, merely consumables for the Wolf King. So, if you were allowed to return, wouldn’t it make all the other scouts know about it?” Zero said, “Your father fell to his death while trying to fill a gap in the wall. Your mother, trying to find the workplace overseer had to suffer punishment with a whip and is now on the verge of death. In a world where God doesn’t examine everything, evil always wantonly flows around like sewage. Are you sure you really want to fight for such a ruler?”

The young boy stared with wide eyes at her, unable to mask his sorrow, “This... is impossible, you’re lying to me!”

“God never lies,” the Purified shook her head. “And in the bottom of your heart, you know that I’m telling the truth. The root of all this evil is the nobility. They never regarded you as one of their own kind, they merely see you as livestock. What the Church is trying to do is to put an end to all this evil and injustice, they want to build a new world under the care and watchful eyes of God.”

With a plopping sound, Eyre sank to his knees, lowered his head and began to cry bitterly, “What should I do?”

“Follow your heart, only God can issue the ruling.”

He choked with sobs and said, “I was wrong. I am willing to tell you everything I know, I will do anything I can to save my mother.”

“Such a clever child,” Zero patted his head then took out a plant with slender leaves from her pocket and held it in front of him, “Eat this, and you will have a good sleep. It will also help you stabilize your mood.” She tore off half a leaf, put it into her mouth, and began to chew, before saying, “Just like me. Wait until tomorrow, after breaking through the walls of Wolfsheart City you might be able to see your mother again.”

Mayne puckered his brows, the Peacefully Sleeping Bracken was

something used in the making of Dream Water. It didn't show any effect on witches, but when taken by ordinary people it was a very severe poison, which required that they intake the Winterflower to neutralize its toxicity. Sure enough, after eating it, it didn't take long until the prisoner's face turned ashen. He forcefully gripped his throat, and looked with an expression of absolute disbelief at the smiling Purified, only able to release some incomprehensible 'och och' sounds. His own fingernails quickly tore open his skin and blood vessels before the blood that came splashing out dyed his neck bright red. His painful struggle continued for half an hour until his body gradually turned limp and he finally stopped breathing.

"It's such a pity that God didn't forgive your sins," Zero said while smiling. Then she walked over toward the Archbishop and bowed in greeting, "Your Excellency, how do you feel about the trial? Did it have the same elegant manner of Excellency Heather?"

"Why must you deceive him into eating the Peacefully Sleeping Bracken?" Mayen asked with a heavy tone, "If it had been Heather, we could have added one devote believer to our ranks. Rather than making him kill himself while thinking he is moving back on the right path."

"If the situation of the captive's loved ones were like I had said, I would naturally have recruited him as a believer, but unfortunately I do not know what really happened to his parents. Those words of mine were nothing more than me talking nonsense." She said in a carefree voice while shrugging, "The moment he discovers that my words were all lies, he would obviously turn against the Church. Believe me, I serve the Church wholeheartedly."

If you served the Church wholeheartedly, you would have properly waited for my orders in the tent, Mayne thought while impatiently turning his head and stating, “The attack will begin soon. You must immediately prepare yourself and move according to the plan, the Wolf King and the Queen of Clear Water —”

“—Must die, Your Excellency,” the Purified said, “If it was me alone, I might not have been able to do it. But since even Isabella has come with me, they absolutely won’t be able to run away.”

*

“Woo-woo-”

The bugle horn’s trumpet, which was the signal to attack, rolled across the horizon. Under the pressuring dark clouds and in the middle of the rustling autumn wind, it raised the curtain to the second act of the siege against Wolfsheart City.

One mile away, the frame of the ‘Siege Beast’ that launched the spears gave out rays of magical light. The moment the light was as bright as the sun, the iron spear suddenly burst straight toward the walls. Flying as though it had been thrown by a giant’s hand, it reached a speed that made it difficult to sight, and a moment later was followed by an earsplitting roar.

After crossing such a long distance the spear had hardly lost any of its might. The moment it hit the wall, it crushed the stone into powder. Even the house-sized boulders were easily pulverized and

the soldiers standing behind the wall were coincidentally also shot dead. After merely three rounds of fire, the city gate was completely smashed, and the surrounding walls utterly broken.

Even though the firing rate of the Devil's siege weapon was equivalent to an ordinary catapult, its range was several times further. Against this kind of offensive, it was absolutely impossible for the garrison force to try and strike back. Unable to see the trajectory of the launch, they weren't even able to determine where the next attack would be hitting, The Church's army hadn't moved, yet the defensive line was already in imminent danger.

Just then, a world-shaking loud boom suddenly sounded behind the wall!

Seeing a massive fireball soar into the sky, the people on the battlefield all felt the earth starting to shake beneath their feet. Then, accompanied by black smoke and fire, the wall collapsed with a loud rumble. Finally creating an opening in this mottled wolf's tooth.

The sharp horn sounded again, the mixed forces composed of the Army of Judges and God's Punishment Army initiated their charge against the city wall. Looking at it from afar, they looked like a flowing reddish-gold ocean, mercilessly swallowing everyone who even dared to stand against it.

Now Wolfsheart's defenders would have to rely on their own flesh and blood in order to withstand these soldiers who stood apart from the mortal world.

Chapter 312 - War Of Mortals (Part 2)

Mortals cannot defeat the Devils, Isabella thought to herself, therefore the Church created the God's Punishment Army.

They possess considerable strength, feel no pain, and know no fear, making them the best weapon against the Devils. Although they don't possess the ability to act on their own, that isn't necessarily a disadvantage in battles between armies.

Against such a powerful force, a garrison of mortals naturally would never be able to resist.

Especially after losing the backing of their city wall, seeking to beat the Church's elite force in a melee fight is nothing less than a wishful dream.

Like a powerful golden current, the Army of Judges dashed through the main gate of Wolfsheart City's wall, entering hand to hand combat against all of the assembled defenders. The red colored God's Punishment Army looked as if they were walking on level ground as they climbed over the collapsed city wall and started to massacre those who attempted to stop the flood of enemies.

"Do you want to go and help them?" Isabella asked after turning towards Zero.

The latter yawned and then said uninterested, "No, my magic is limited, so I have to save it for the important targets."

“You could just use the sword, hammer, or crossbow to fight ah,” Isabella said, feeling displeased, “No matter what they wouldn’t be able to beat you.”

Zero shook her head, “If I go, they will easily win. If I don’t go, they will still easily win. There is no point in doing it, so I don’t want to.”

“Alright,” she changed the subject. “Why did you do that before?”

“Why?”

“While you were playing with the prisoners, the Bishop’s face was stiff for the whole time,” said Isabella. “It seems that he doesn’t appreciate your kind of trial, and also he is the most likely candidate to be the next Pope, when that time comes you might suffer a lot.”

“The reason why Excellency Mayne becomes angry is only because he hasn’t become the Pope yet,” Zero said carelessly. “When he goes into the library at the top of the Pivotal Secret Temple, he will come to understand that my way of handling things is exactly the way in which to please God.”

“What... way of handling?”

“Playing with, ah,” the Purified ran her hands through her hair

to tidy the mess created by the wind. “God has never descended on the world, he also doesn’t protect his people. Only by having a single illusory objective can we guarantee to take over when someone else fails to reach it, in hopes of receiving his favor. Doesn’t this concept resemble the trial I just held? I at least provided him with a real objective, something that God never will. It isn’t even guaranteed that his objective is realistic or whether everything is our own crazy raving. Yet even with so much uncertainty, we still dash onward with no thought to our personal safety... Tsktsk, it is truly the most thorough play.”

What’s this woman talking about? Why can’t I understand one word? Isabella knitted her brows and asked confused, “Have you ever been to the library?”

“No,” She shrugged her shoulders, “These were words His Holiness O’Brian had said to me. He isn’t a witch, and his lifespan is already approaching its end. I heard that when mortals reach their end, they will start to reminisce on their life and will always hope to find someone to talk to about it. He even wants to let me swallow him before his death.”

“You can’t –”

“Of course I mustn’t, that would make Excellency Mayne furious,” Zero interrupted, “Rest assured, I know what I’m allowed to do and what not.” A mysterious smile played around her lips, “There is another possibility. What will happen if I lose? Can’t I then offer up my body as a present to him?”

“I don’t think so. If you lose, chances are that nothing is going to

happen.” Isabella sighed, this woman is a strange one, probably because of her ability – after swallowing so many people, it’s very hard for her to find something she hadn’t experienced yet. Which leads to her seldom being interested in anything and instead is simply doing everything for the sake of pleasure, furthermore, only an unusual pleasure will suffice.

Isabella moved her line of sight back to the battlefield. A group of desperados suddenly appeared from the gaps in the city wall and started charging into the ranks of the God’s Punishment Army. Most of them came to a screaming end at the end of a spear, but there were still a few who managed to slip through the net. The sound of explosions began to rise, followed by smoke rising to cover all of the gaps within the wall.

This should be the new alchemy weapon which started to appear during the last siege, she thought. It seems quite powerful; thus it would be a good choice to use it against the demonic beasts. But using it in an attempt to deal with the God’s Punishment Army is just a quick way to commit suicide. If it weren’t for those pills, they would never even have dared to approach the soldiers of the God’s Punishment Army.

On the other side, the mighty current of the golden ocean slowed as raging flames suddenly emerged on the path through the city gate, isolating the soldiers who had already entered the city from the Judges still standing in front. Some people who were caught by the flames desperately started to roll over the ground to try and extinguish the flames, but it was to no avail.

“Hmm... the amount of the God’s Stone of Retaliation has

increased exponentially behind the gates. There are even two high-quality stones present. It seems as if someone important has come.” Isabella opened her mouth.

“That being the case, let’s go and end it,” Zero said, and leisurely stretched her waist.

“But those two are neither the Wolf King nor the Queen of Clear Water,” Isabella informed while glancing at the city, “The most intense reaction is still inside the castle. Are you sure you want to go?”

“Isn’t the army in trouble? Winning easily and winning miserably isn’t the same. I still have to help His Holiness O’Brian reduce the losses,” Zero tilted her head and continued in an earnest tone, “Just like I said before, I serve the Church wholeheartedly.”

It was already afternoon when Wolfsheart City’s defensive line finally broke under the siege warfare. After the soldier of the God’s Punishment Army got control over the city gate, the Army of Judges began to chase the enemy’s soldiers through the streets to clear up all the resistance.

“The targets have started to move,” Isabella said after looking toward the direction of the castle, “It seems they intend to go to the river dock.”

Those two people who had come to organize the resistance at the

wall and city gates were the Wolf King's sons. And now, through the information she gathered after swallowing both of them, Zero further confirmed that the two moving God's Stones of Retaliation with the highest reaction were indeed the primary targets of this mission.

In addition, they had also taken care of a fallen witch who looked and dressed as if she was of a different tribe. After the death of the witch, the militia forces who dared to go against the God's Punishment Army suddenly reduced by a lot.

"They probably want to leave by ship," Zero said with a blooming smile. "Let's go and complete the mission given to us by His Holiness."

The action of the other side made it clear that they were very cautious. On their way toward the docks they changed routes several times and when they finally arrived at the pier they didn't board one of those huge ships with black sails, but instead chose the small sloop of a merchant.

But no matter how hard they tried to cover their whereabouts, in front of the constantly monitoring Isabella their movements were immediately exposed.

The moment the Wolf King and the Queen of Clear Water boarded the deck of the ship, two people came over from the other side of the pier. There were twenty additional soldiers on top of the ship, most of them were personal guards. When they saw the two appear, they immediately knew that something was amiss without even needing to think about it. Thus everyone drew their

weapon and jumped off the vessel, throwing themselves straight at the Purifieds.

It was once more time for Zero to display her superior fighting skills. She was empty handed as she seized the sword of a personal guard and drew everyone in to start fighting against her. With every sword stroke she made an enemy collapse, her footsteps lithe and quick, with only a few people able to anticipate her next move. Whether it was a poke, strike, chop, or block, Zero always used the appropriate amount of strength and the trickiest angle to strike, and soon, more than a dozen personal guards were lying on the ground, everyone having been killed by one sword.

The Wolf King pulled out the sword at his waist, ready to throw himself into a desperate fight.

“Isabella!” Zero cried.

“I know,” the latter immediately launched her ability – forming a circle of light that was only visible to the magic eye. Within Isabella’s field of vision, the lightless domains formed by the God’s Stone of Retaliation appeared, each of them was trembling at a different frequency, like ripples on the surface of water. She controlled her field until it trembled at the same frequency, then connected it with the domain of the God’s Stone of Retaliation. Both sides of ripples immediately canceled each other out, leading to the domain becoming level and smooth.

At that moment, Zero immediately turned into a beam of light, and drilled herself into the Wolf King’s body.

The Wolf King began to twist before changing into the form of the Purified, after seeing this the Queen of Clear Water revealed an incredulous look, “How can this be possible? Why are you able to use your power around the God’s Stones of Retaliation?”

“Because the God’s Stones of Retaliation isn’t what you believe...” Isabella said while still smoothing out the ripples of her opponent’s domain, “But there isn’t really a reason for you to know this, because... your end has come.”

The moment her voice had fallen, Zero threw herself directly at Garcia.

Chapter 313 - The Battle Of The Soul

She hadn't felt such a warm sunshine in a long time.

Garcia stood in the garden and took in a deep breath, inhaling the smell of rosemary coming along the breeze.

This was no longer the Kingdom of Eternal Winter; besides the forever frozen soil and the non-aromatic Winterflower, that country in the extreme north really had nothing to offer. Within that castle's backyard, lumps of meat and pig guts would always be hung out to dry in the open air, making it impossible to get rid of the awful smell. This place was also not the Port of Clear Water, with its familiar taste of salt and its moist air, where if she closed her eyes, she could hear waves breaking over the beach.

This is the palace of Graycastle, she thought.

But... its appearance was somewhat different from what she remembered.

Garcia sat down at the central flowered pond, gently caressing the slightly rough rocks – back in her childhood, while playing hide-and-seek, she had fallen to the ground and fiercely hit her head against the stones on the side of the flower pond. Since then her father had ordered for all the stones to be broken into small pebbles. As a result, it was then impossible to hurt oneself when stumbling, but it had also become impossible to hide oneself behind them.

At that time, she remembered, that besides herself, Gerald and Timothy had also been present. Seeing their younger sister fall down both of them had become very frightened. To coax her to stop her sobbing, one by one they'd made themselves fall and deliberately knocked their head against the stones at the side of the pond. Of course, afterward, they were ruthlessly beaten up by their father.

It was a period in her life that Garcia thought she would never recall again. It was like a secret hidden beneath a tree, deeply buried in the earth. But now that she's returned to this familiar place, she discovered that the scenery hasn't faded in the slightest. After digging it out of the earth, it still appeared just as vivid and lifelike as in the past.

It seemed as if everything has returned back to the time in her childhood.

"As it turns out, this is your world," an unknown voice sounded from behind her, "As a resting place, it's a pretty good choice."

Garcia turned around, and saw a woman dressed in white coming from the direction of the flowered pond. She had a pair of light red eyes and long, snow white hair, her facial features were so delicate that they seemed to have been carved, and her voice was ethereal and melodious, all in all she was like a god who had fallen into the mortal world.

The face of the Queen of Clear Water completely darkened as she stated, "You are the Church's witch."

“My name is Zero, the word ‘witch’ doesn’t suit me,” she laughed. “I’m called a ‘Purified’. My blood, and that of those fallen, is entirely different.”

“A Purified? That’s just the term the Church uses for the toys they’ve raised,” Garcia said coldly, “What kind of trick is this scenery? Does your ability allows you to create illusions?” She suddenly picked up a stone and squeezed it in her hand. “It’s just an illusion! None of this will fool me!”

The Queen’s cry traveled far, but the scenery remained entirely unaffected. When she opened her hand, she saw that the stone in her hand wasn’t crushed, instead, her skin was cut by its hard edges and corners. The pain bursting from the wound seemed clear and real.

“It appears that you aren’t completely unaware of witch abilities. That makes things much easier,” Zero grasped the hem of her skirt and gave a slight bow, “Welcome to the World of Consciousness, I call this place the Battlefield of Souls. It is here where we will carry out our fight. The winner gets everything, the loser loses all... Just as God proclaims in the Holy Book.”

Souls... battlefield.

Garcia stared blankly, trying to digest what she had just heard when she suddenly felt a sharp pain coming from her lung. She didn’t know from where the pike had come, but somehow Zero had had directly thrust it into her chest. Her breathing

immediately turned heavy, when she tried to open her mouth and shout, not even the smallest of sounds came out. Meanwhile, Zero turned the pike around and fiercely pulled it back, blood came spraying out of the wound, soon covering half of her body. Garcia sank to her knees, trembling as she tried to cover her wounds, but due to the enormous blood loss, her consciousness had already begun to blur.

The next moment she found herself standing at her former place in perfect condition. The shadows standing a few meters away from her, as she had never left her place to begin with.

What happened? Garcia opened her mouth wide, taking in a deep breath, an illusion? Her hands were still fiercely pressing against her chest, and she could still feel an aching pain at the place the wound from a moment ago had been. Lowering her head, she saw a large spray of blood scattered around her feet.

“This is the basic rule. One’s consciousness isn’t immortal,” Zero explained, spreading out her hands, “The pain of every death will feel real to you. It will slowly consume your mental and physical strength, and when this sense exceeds your limits it will be time for your eternal rest.

“Every time you die, your body will return to its original state. An average person can withstand at most three to four times, of course, I have also seen a lot of determined individuals who managed to go through seven, eight, or even more deaths,” She explained gently. “Although I am looking forward to your performance, I can also understand if you give up. After all, the feeling of continuous death is an unbearable suffering. At this

point, choosing to escape isn't a cowardly behavior, especially when the outcome has already been decided."

Finished speaking with the dropped pike in her hand and a great sword on her back she leaped forward and tried splitting Garcia apart.

The latter stared with wide open eyes, she is wearing a white gown, there is no way for her to hide such a huge weapon. All these weapons are... coming out of thin air? Suddenly the other's words reappeared in her mind –

"This is your world..."

"I call it the Battlefield of Souls."

"One's consciousness isn't immortal... everything is real to you."

The great sword chopped down, but instead of cutting the former Queen of Clear Water in two, it slammed against a huge iron shield. Confronted with the huge unexpected rebound, Zero lost her grip on the sword as it flew into the air, at the same time her body was also forced a few steps back. Garcia, because of the great strength she'd used to deflect the heavy blow, fell to the ground.

"The end is already destined?" She ground her teeth and sneered, "Previously you said this is 'my world', didn't you?" The moment the words fell, she popped up, and a crossbow suddenly appeared in her hand immediately releasing the arrow at Zero.

Simultaneously a crucifix raised up behind her and firmly trapped her body.

In a flash the crossbow arrow drilled into the abdomen of the Purified, immediately causing a suffering expression to appear on her face. After gasping twice, Zero opened her mouth, “Th-that surprised me... cough cough, as an ordinary person... just accepting this is already very hard, n-not to mention using your own consciousness to retaliate. You just proved... why the Queen of Clear Water is able to cause Mayne so many headaches.”

“Thank you very much for your praise,” Garcia said while picking up the spear that had fallen on the ground. “If it weren’t for you talking too much I would never have been able to comprehend the wonders of the World of Consciousness so quickly. Now, should I put some more holes in you?”

Zero laughed challengingly, “For now, I’ll let you do as you like.”

When Garcia stabbed her for the tenth time, the Purified finally died – she had deliberately avoided piercing any of the fatal points, slowly moving from the hands and feet toward the abdomen. At first the Purified had cried out miserably, but later on her voice had gradually started to break.

Next, that animal should be restored to her original state, right? However, this is the palace of Graycastle, it’s my home ground. Since it is possible to change the environment and objects at will, I cannot lose.

Sure enough, the body of the Purified flashed in a white light. In the blink of an eye, all of her wounds had disappeared, and Zero once again opened her light red eyes.

Garcia lifted the pike, readying to send her to her death once again, but suddenly everything changed – the hands bound to the crucifix easily broke the rope, kicked against the pike, then instantly appeared at Garcia’s side and delivered a strike with her raised hand. Before Garcia could respond, she had already lost sense of her body.

With a loud bang the headless body collapsed, yet the other’s hands were still empty.

How can this be?

After her restoration, the Queen of Clear Water clutched her neck and took two steps back and felt somewhat uncertain... Just now, did she use her empty hands to cut off my neck? Seeing the broken hemp rope and the blood on her hands, it became apparent that the previous scene hadn’t been an illusion.

“If you couldn’t understand the nature of the World of Consciousness, how could I get a real fight?” Zero smiled and said, “You seem very puzzled about how I got my hands out of the thick rope, isn’t that right? In fact, this isn’t so difficult to understand, ‘The winner gets everything, the loser loses all’... Among those people whom I’ve swallowed, there is a class of witches who are unusually powerful. Their might is boundless, their body is

nimble, and they don't need to fear the effect of the God's Stone of Retaliation. You might not know of them, but the Church has a particular term for them – Extraordinary.

She opened her hands, “It is impossible to beat me by only using common methods. If you want to survive, you will have to double your effort... Now, it's my turn.”

Chapter 314 - Annihilation

It was Garcia's first-time experiencing the horror of an extraordinary.

The weapon in her hand was obviously only an ordinary one-handed sword, but the burst of pressure from her every move seemed to absorb parts of her soul. Each blow that came raining down on her shield was as heavy as a strike from a two-handed sword. Two or three blows later, Garcia could no longer even lift her arm and was hit on her chin by an upwards moving strike.

After her restoration, the Queen of Clear Water thoroughly abandoned defense, and before she could second guess herself, a ballista had already appeared in front of her body. She pulled the trigger, it wasn't an iron spear that she released, but several jars of black water. Reacting instinctively, Zero cut the jars apart, only to get showered in the black water. When the pieces of fire crystal hidden inside the jars came in contact with the air, they quickly began burning, and turned the whole area into a pillar of fire.

However, it was still not guaranteed that this would work. After all, Zero could still use her speed which far surpassed everything an ordinary person could ever achieve to move around the flower pond while the ballista couldn't even turn around. Thus, Garcia had no other alternative than to rely on raising the stone walls embedded with spears to restrict the Purified's movement. In addition, she turned the flower pots surrounding the pond into explosives by filling them with snow powder, and hid several pits into the ground, setting up a formation of deathly traps.

After killing the other side several times like this, Garcia discovered that her breathing gradually became heavy, beads of sweat started running down her forehead and waves of dizziness started to attack her mind, leaving her almost unable to keep standing upright.

“Well done,” the once again reborn Purified said, she wasn’t taking advantage of Garcia’s weakened state and was instead clapping her hands. “That you are able to do all this far surpasses my expectations. However, there is something I forgot to tell you. Even though you can use your consciousness to change the environment and venue in this world, it will consume a much larger amount of energy than creating completely new things... the amount is even similar to one’s restoration. You should already be feeling the weakness and exhaustion taking over your body, maybe after your next death, you will already fall into an eternal sleep.”

“Ah, that’s still better than getting one’s neck cut off,” Garcia panted heavily, “But you seem to forget the screams you made when being burned by the evil fire. I do not think you’ll be able to hold on any longer than me.”

“...” After a moment of silence, Zero said, “Ever since I’ve become a Purified, the Church has given me a lot of support to improve my abilities. From increasing my knowledge to teaching me fighting skill, to feeding me with Judges to improve my ability. Those Judges, even knowing that they would be sacrificing themselves, were still glad to enter the Battlefield of Souls. Here, in the World of Conscious, they honed my skills in life and death struggles, reassuring me that they accept their death before transmitting all of their insight and experiences to me.

Garcia did not interrupt her words. Even if the other was stalling for time, she also needed a break.

“I have swallowed up an extraordinary, and her strength was impressive – I nearly lost a Battle of Souls. But in the end, I relied on the Devil’s weapons to prevail over her and then got everything from her. Due to the different characteristics of magic, I can’t actually turn into an extraordinary or use the abilities of the witches I swallow. However, here in the World of Consciousness, these differences don’t matter to me. In the last two hundred years, I can’t even remember the number of people I have swallowed, but there have only ever been a few individuals who could threaten me. All their pain, happiness, sadness, and delights they’ve had in their life, became part of my own personal experience...” She paused, “Including their death.”

“What exactly do you want to tell me?” Garcia cautiously asked.

“The difference between you and me,” replied Zero calmly. “The assimilation of so many souls has made my will matchless. In case you want to know the number of death I can survive, I think I can bear at least hundreds of death by now.”

“In that case, I will have to help you to verify it.” She scoffed. But inwardly her heart sunk... When looking at her demeanor, it doesn’t seem that she is merely bluffing. From the time at the pier, where she cleanly and easily killed all their personal guards, it could be seen that this Purified possessed fighting skills that went beyond her age. If that’s the case, I need to use even more powerful weapons... quickly, what can I think of that can easily kill even an experienced super witch?

“The Battle of Souls isn’t a contest to decide who has the greater imagination,” Zero said, as if she already seen through her, “You cannot make yourself impervious to sword and spear without foundation, nor can you summon the weapons which destroyed heaven and earth from the legends of ancient times... Things you cannot understand you also cannot create, what we have seen and understood is the key to success.”

“Then I’ll just cover the whole garden with strong snow powder, even you will be unable to avoid it,” Garcia declared coldly, “Even if I die, at least I will drag you down with me!”

“Even if killing me doesn’t have the least bit of importance?” The Purified looked at her with eyes full of pity. “In that case, let me show you the real power of the Church.”

Suddenly a red light appeared behind Zero and condensed into a ferocious looking war chariot. Its shape had such extreme dimensions that it immediately crashed against the walls of the garden. To Garcia, the two sharp metal spears at the top of its head looked like the report given by one of the Wolf King’s personal guards – a kind of never before seen ballista which was attacking the walls. Both its range or power are at unprecedented levels. Don’t tell me that this monster in front of me, is what the guard has been speaking about.

Then she heard a loud hum.

The thick and solid spear directly broke through the layer upon

layers of barriers Garcia had set up, not even bothering to spend any power to tear her in half as she was immediately sent flying backward. As she flew she could see her own organs and blood being left behind.

In unbroken succession, the war chariot continued to shoot those spears, thus soon after being restored, she again suffered the same death. She didn't even have enough time to create the snow powder and take the enemy down with her. Under the constant pain, her consciousness gradually became blurred, the earth began to shake, cracks appeared in the sky, lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, and the garden burst into a blazing fire.

“A strong will can only delay defeat, it cannot change the outcome. Close your eyes now,” Zero said, “You’ve held it for long enough, rest in peace.”

The moment her voice fell, the whole world broke apart.

“Is it over?” Isabella curled her lips, “Shouldn’t it be done in an instant? You’ve already changed back into your original appearance, but for quite a while now you haven’t said a word... I thought you really failed this time.”

“I found some fascinating things in her memory,” Zero opened her eyes, “This way of thinking... makes me sigh.”

“Oh? There are still things which can make you sigh?” Isabella

said carelessly, “That kind of strange alchemy powder should be something you have found out, right?”

“Well, the alchemist called it strong snow powder and the composition is quite simple. All the needed components are the most common things in the workshop.”

“If it’s like that then let us go back to the Holy City to report, we have already fulfilled all the orders given by His Holiness O’Brien,” she spat out. “This battle will continue for at least three to four days, but now without a leader or witch to guide them, those remnants won’t count as a threat to the God’s Punishment Army.”

“Let’s go,” Zero nodded.

“Hold on...” Isabella shouted for her to stop.

“What happened?”

Was it an illusion? Obviously, there’s no change in her appearance from before. But why do I feel that the look from her light red eyes has become somewhat different? Isabella carefully studied her counterpart but then shook her head, “No... it’s nothing.”

I guess I’m just overthinking things.

Chapter 315 - Celebration Feast

A grand celebration banquet was being held in the main hall of Border Town's castle.

In addition to the witches, the high-ranking staff in City Hall and the First Army all fully attended this feast. There were the nobles Barov Mons and Carter Lannis, and also Iron Axe and Kyle Sichi who were from a civilian background. Especially for the latter, Roland had to spend a lot of effort to persuade him to come out of the laboratory and attend this according to him “meaningless” banquet.

To include his subjects in this joyful event, besides giving a public speech he'd also ordered the kitchen staff to bake a large amount of white bread by using the leftover refined starch from manufacturing explosives, and distribute the bread to all of the town's people. As long as they were in possession of an identification card, they could get a limited amount of delicious food at the City Hall. Even while the First Army was on their way home, most of the town's inhabitants had already learned of their victory in battle.

Of course, they may not necessarily understand the purpose and significance of the expedition, but as long as there was free bread it counted as a day of celebrate for them.

This was also Roland's first time imitating those “lofty” banquets hosted in King's City.

There was no barbecue and no large pieces of stewed meat, all the food was cut into small pieces and splendidly arranged on spotlessly white plates. At the edge of the table stood several basins that contained all kinds of seasonings, so that they could flavor their food according to their own taste, similar to the buffets of later generations.

“Welcome back,” Roland said, carrying two glasses of wine to Anna, “The journey must have been hard for you.”

“You already said that at the pier,” Anna took one glass, “And my answer is still the same, ‘it wasn’t hard’.”

When their glasses faintly touched each other, her eyes were filled with a sweet smile. Seeing this, Roland had to struggle to resist the impulse to embrace her on the spot. Instead, he went on and exchanged a celebration cup with the other witches.

“What about me?” Lightning shouted.

“You’ll also get your share,” Roland said, calling over a waiter from whom he then took a glass of cider for her, “Work hard.”

“I demand to drink white!” The little girl looked at him with big eyes.

“Uh huh...” After thinking about it, Roland finally decided to fulfill her wish. After all, this kid’s curiosity had always been quite high, so if he refused her all the time, maybe she would learn from

Nightingale and sneak into the kitchen, but she'd be stealing wine instead, "Alright, but only one drink."

"Yeah!"

When Roland handed her a weak white wine mixed with ice and grape juice, she suddenly approached and gave him a kiss on his cheek.

"Keke... Is this the custom from the Fjords?"

"Sure," Lightning nodded seriously, "That's what my father told me!"

Because it wasn't the first time they saw it, the other witches of the Witch Alliance didn't feel that it was too strange. However, Sylvie's eyes became round from shock before throwing an accusatory glance at Roland, and saw he was moving along while wearing an awkward expression – does there really exist such a custom of kissing the head when celebrating heroic deed in the Fjords?

Then it was time to exchange a toast with the ministers.

When it came to the chief alchemist's turn, the man leaned over and whispered, "Your Highness, since you gave me the 'Intermediate Chemistry' I have already read it twice, but, there are still a lot of things that I can't understand.

“If you are talking about that sub-atomic constitution of matter, that part involves a lot of physical knowledge, so you have to read another book to understand it.” Roland pointed out, “So, I suggest that you first read the ‘Elementary Physics’ before going through the remnants of the Intermediate Chemistry again. This way, many of your doubts should be answered.”

“That’s what I was going to do, but...” he hesitated for a moment before continuing, “Your Royal Highness, why are the colors used on the cover of each ancient book different? Does it have any special meaning to it?”

“That is...” Roland pondered for a moment, “The color represents the requirements and time needed to comprehend it.”

“It was like this?” Kyle mused, “From green to purple. So, it seems that the deeper the color, the more profound is the knowledge recorded within. In that way, ‘Advanced Chemistry’ must surely be black?”

“No, it is orange.”

“Ah,” Kyle got startled, “Why?”

Roland smiled, “Who knows?”

Halfway through the banquet, Roland stepped out of the hall and went to the castle terrace. Standing in the gently blowing evening

breeze, he couldn't help but feel a slight chill. Half of autumn has already passed he realized, so in other words, it wouldn't be long before the lengthy winter would cover the whole Western Territory with snow and bring about the Months of Demons.

But the situation during this year and the previous year had become as different as black and white. The trade with Margaret's Chamber of Commerce had brought in a lot of floating amount of money, and in exchange for food and materials many of these gold royals were paid to the people in the form of a salary. According to statistics from the convenience market, the recent sales of products has shown a lot of growth, from which some of the goods would significantly improve the people's quality of life. Sales for products such as steak and eggs was growing especially quickly.

There was no doubt that this was a sign of the gradual improvement in the living standards for the people. In particular, the indigenous population had all received new free housing, while their salary, compared to before, had also increased a lot. Nowadays, they had even started to buy food which they usually could only enjoy during festivals. The newly introduced population was still at the stage where they were busy saving money in order to purchase a house, but when they manage to settle down the market was bound to usher for a new peak in sales.

What exactly do people need? Sometimes, eating and drinking one's fill was already enough to be grateful to their Lord and follow him until their death.

During this era, most civilians were easy to please.

“Your Highness, beware of catching a cold,” Nightingale said, and appeared behind him with a thin coat in hand. She threw the cloth to Roland, took out a piece of dried fish from a bag and came to stand beside him, “What’s going on here?”

“Nothing,” Roland said, showing her a smile while he put on the coat, “I just suddenly had the urge to see my territory.”

“It seems the town is still very busy,” Nightingale said and pointed to the still brightly lit town square, “It’s already night time and there are still so many people who haven’t gone home.”

“That’s because today was the first time they were showing the new drama, ‘Dawn’,” Roland explained happily, “Furthermore, it was also the first show after the troupe’s several months of departure from Border Town. So, the villagers have probably been full of anticipation to see Miss May and Misses Irene again.”

But that being said, Miss May would soon become Lady May Lannis. He actually had never expected that his own Chief Knight would act so decisively to hold the hands of the Star of the West. When the other side had informed him with a sincere face about his intention, he was first stupefied for a while before he was finally to respond. The wedding of the Chief Knight needed the approval of his Lord, but Roland naturally had no objection to this kind of happy event. In the end, the wedding for the two was scheduled for after the end of the Months of Demons, more precisely, for the day when Border Town officially became a city.

“It was a dead place when I first snuck into this town,” Nightingale exclaimed, “But now, even while standing in the

castle, it seems I still feel the joyful atmosphere surrounding us.”

“Life will improve, day by day,” Roland looked up, looking at the cloudless night sky as he took in a deep breath. There were still many things left to be done such as expanding the scope of education, setting up a public health care, increasing the amount of cultural constructions, encouraging birth rate and so forth. All these things would transform the Western Territory into a stable force and lay out the foundation for the unification of Greycastle.

Nightingale tilted her head and looked at him with keen eyes as she asked, “So what about us?”

“Of course, the same is also true for you,” Roland said as he patted her head, “I promise.”

Chapter 316 - Re-Exploration Of The Stone Tower

When Lightning saw His Highness leave she pulled Maggie to the corner of the hall.

“Goo?”

Maggie’s hair was almost hanging to the floor, giving her the appearance of a floating ghost whenever she moved. Pushing aside the white hair covering her cheeks, Maggie’s high puffed up cheeks and the half swallowed crisp pork chop dangling in her small mouth became visible.

“I found a fascinating place,” Lightning whispered. “It’s hidden inside the Concealing Forest, I intend to go and explore it tomorrow. Would you like to come with me on an adventure?”

“Guru,” Maggie swallowed the food in her mouth and nodded again and again, “I want, I want. What should we prepare?”

“To go on an adventure, you need three items... Wrong, three of the most commonly used things,” Lightning discovered that from time to time she has started to use His Highness’ strange vocabulary. “You need a flint, dry food, and a dagger. The place isn’t far from here. So it will be fine if you just take along enough food for a day. Don’t fill your whole pocket with it like you did last time.”

“Okay goo,” Maggie patted her chest, ready to leave, but Lightning stopped her once again.

“Remember, that this adventure is our secret. Don’t tell anyone else about it,” the little girl said, “We’ll start early tomorrow morning.”

Looking at Maggie’s back, who couldn’t wait to get back to the table full of food, she curled her lips and began to think about their plan for tomorrow.

Despite the success of the bombing mission and meeting His Highness’ expectation, she found that her flying has become much less flexible than before, as if something was holding her back. Whenever Lightning raised her speed, she would always have the feeling that a Devil was chasing her.

This obstruction was brought by fear, she realized. Furthermore, the source of her fear was the exploration of the Stone Tower, when she saw the horrible figure in the basement doorway, she had lost her cool and calm. At that time, her only thought had been to flee from that place as quickly as she could. Ever since then she had started to question her identity as an explorer.

“Fear is not terrible, terrible is the unknown. If you want to overcome it, you must approach it first.”

Within her heart, Lightning silently repeated her father’s teaching again and again. Tomorrow she might encounter real danger, but an explorer should not be afraid of risk, nor should

they shrink back. If she couldn't get over it, she was scared that she would never be able to fly freely again.

This was also the reason why Lightning decided to keep the adventure hidden from His Royal Highness and act without authorization. According to His Royal Highness' plan, the exploration of the Stone Tower was scheduled for after the Months of Demons and would be a cooperation between the First Army and the witches. However, she was worried that by that time, even if they visited the Stone Tower once again, it would be hard for her to see it as somehow fulfilling the idea of "conquering the fear" – only daring to approach the danger zone by relying on the strength of everyone, just couldn't be called an adventure.

Afterward, His Highness may scold her, even going so far as confiscating her ice cream, and her sisters from the Witch Alliance would surely also be worried, but she was still determined to go through with it.

As the daughter of the Fjord's greatest explorer Thunder, Lightning just couldn't accept her cowardly self.

But it didn't mean that her decision was a reckless act. Compared with her unprepared attempt a few months ago, she now had a revolver -a gift from His Highness-, possessed a greater understanding of the Devils, and lastly, she was being accompanied by Maggie.

Especially the last point... If they really did encounter a group of Devils in the Stone Tower and even if Maggie couldn't change into her demonic beast's appearance to drive them away, they would at

least still be able to flee on their own.

An explorer doesn't need a brigade of troops to increase their courage, she thought, but they can still have a few trusted teammates.

After dinner, Lightning gathered some pieces of honeyed meat and put it into a cloth bag, she then added torches, weapons, and water bags.

The successful completion of the bombing mission gave her some confidence, together with His Highness's encouragement and her slightly cheeky reputation let her feel doubly courageous. And just like the blacksmith's saying went, 'it's best to strike while the iron is hot', tomorrow would be the best time for them to depart.

At first light, Lightning flew to the top of the castle, where Maggie was already sitting on the wall and waiting for her.

"Let me check your package."

"I got everything you told me, goo," she changed back to her original form, opened her backpack and held it in front so that the little girl could confirm its content. This time she had reduced the amount of food to half, but at least had also added a dagger and a flint.

"Alright, this can be counted as qualified... let's set off," Lightning said rising into the air, flying together with the pigeon

toward the Concealing Forest.

In her mind, Lightning had already repeated the journey many times, reaching a point where she could find her way there even with her eyes closed. The weather was a bit overcast today, but it was still much better than the dark clouds that had been there last time. As the color of earth slowly fell away behind them, the closer they came to the Stone Tower, the greater became Lightning's nervousness.

“Did you say you found an interesting place last night, was it a new eagle nest?” Maggie asked after a while.

“No, it's much more interesting than that,” Lightning shook her head. “The target we want to explore is an ancient relict, a stone tower that has been left behind for more than four hundred years. Since the basement hasn't collapsed yet, we might be able to find some ancient books if we are lucky.”

“Ancient books?” Maggie shook her wings, “That doesn't sound as if it's more exciting than digging for eagle eggs, goo.”

“An eagle nest has at most two to three eggs, something which you finish up in a flash,” the little girl said. “But, if you actually can find such a book and bring it back to His Royal Highness, he will surely reward you with a basket full of eggs. Whether you cook or steam them, you'll be able to eat three eggs every day for a long time to come.”

“Really?” Maggie was full of spirit immediately, “Then let’s hurry up and look for ancient books! Googoo!”

Around noon, the two successfully arrived at their destination.

The remaining half of the stone tower was still hidden within the woods covered in moss and vines. Everything around them looked the same as a few months ago, it didn’t seem as if anything had changed. Yet, Lightning still lowered her height and flew a few rounds around the tower to confirm their safety before landing gently.

“Have we arrived, goo?” the pigeon shouted from above her head.

“Hush–” Lightning signaled her to be silent, within the silence of the forest their voices seem particularly noisy, “Speak softly. There could be Devils nearby.”

“The Devil?” Maggie’s tail immediately erected.

“You wait for me at the top,” Lightning said with a lowered voice, pointing to the upper part of the broken tower. “I will go and take a look at the situation first.”

When she walked over the gradually withered grass, she could hear a slight rustling sound coming from her foot. Reaching the entrance of the tower, she saw that it hadn’t been covered by plants and that the small cluster of vines cut off by her dagger last

time was still there. Holding her breath, she moved forward along the former road and entered the tower. Taking one step after another, she slowly neared the center of the tower with its passage to the basement. At the time she saw the stair leading into the darkness in front of her, she even heard her heart loudly pounding.

Fear comes from the unknown, to overcome the fear, you have to approach the unknown... the little girl constantly encouraged herself, then lit a torch and climbed the stairs leading down.

Reaching the corner of the channel, she quietly shot out a probing glance, only fragments were left from the collapsed wooden door. The basement entrance also wasn't blocked by the Devil, the only thing left behind at the door was a thick darkness, like an open mouth waiting to swallow the people who enter.

At this moment, she suddenly heard traces of a voice floating over from the darkness, only faintly discernible but still feeling very familiar –

Immediately all of her hairs were fully erected, her body was grasped by shivers and the almost uncontrollable urge to turn around and flee came up once again! She grit her teeth and struggled to suppress the boiling fear at the bottom of her heart. Then, covering her mouth, she bent an ear and listened attentively one more time.

This time the call was much clearer, the tone exactly the same as last time.

“Help me...”

Chapter 317 - “Ice Coffin”

Lightning felt goosebumps roll over her body.

She suddenly remembered all the stories that were spread among explorers – Demons crawling from the abyss, the vengeful ghosts still bearing a grudge at the end of their life, or the wandering undead. These were the nightmares of every explorer, even if they were already dead they were still able to take someone’s life. They were exceptionally good at using illusions and deception, so could it be that one of these monsters were hidden within this ruin?

Although Thunder had said that these stories were just some nonsense made up by third-rate explorers, but at this moment she still felt shaken to her core. Otherwise, who would ever be able to keep shouting under the Devil’s siege, even holding the same tone and interval after several months have passed?

She was now facing a dilemma – if they were indeed one of these evil things from folklore, they would have killed all Devils, but then it would become difficult for her to escape after having trespassed into their domain. But if the other party was still able to hold on until now, shouldn’t those Devils still be inside then, what should we do?

After hesitating for a moment, in the end, she decided to fly back to Maggie to discuss the next step with her.

After hearing a short narration about the current situation, Maggie raised her head and said, “We could extinguish the torch

and stealthily find our way in goo, this way those Devils won't be able to see us."

"Uh, but then we won't be able to see them either."

"I can turn into an owl," said the pigeon rubbing her face, "The dark of night isn't a big problem for me, goo."

Lightning's eyes lit up, "That's a good idea, but... those legendary evil creatures, they live in the dark all their lives. Doesn't that mean they might have a way to find their prey? Otherwise, they should have died from starvation long ago, right?"

"Didn't you say that they were all made up stories meant to frighten people?"

"It wasn't me who said that, it was my father." The little girl corrected.

"That's all the same. Anyway, living in Greycastle I have never heard of those undead monsters, if they were indeed so horrible, they shouldn't only remain in a little place like the Fjords, right?" Rays of light suddenly broke out of Maggie, and the pigeon suddenly began to swell, turning into a gray-brown owl, her eyes full of eagerness, "I thought you would be interested in these legends."

That's right, if I want to qualify as an explorer, I should never let go of an opportunity to verify a legend. Not to mention that I still

have to defeat my heart demons, if I flee now, I will waste all of my previous efforts. After hesitating for a moment, Lightning decided to go along with Maggie's suggestion.

But wait... the reason why I want to explore the ruins at all cost is so that I can overcome my fear, but why is Maggie so interested in exploring them? Could it be...

"It can't be that you're so impatient because of the basket of eggs, right?"

Hearing the question, the owl blinked her two big eyes before turning her head away.

Once again standing in front of the entrance to the basement, Lightning took a deep breath, tightly gripped her revolver as she silently entered into the deep darkness.

She felt much calmer compared to before, that was probably because Maggie was squatting on her shoulder.

The ground under her feet felt very wet, even so far that they could encounter some puddle of water from time to time. This area was the terrain's lowest point, thus the rain falling over the tower would slowly come to gather here. Although the basement was equipped with a drainage system in general, after facing wind and rain for hundreds of years, these hidden ditches were most probably already clogged up since an earlier time.

Maggie patted her head with her wings, signaling that there were stairs leading downward in front of them.

Lightning slowed her pace, and carefully, little by little she searched her way to the edge of the stairwell. Then, after having cautiously gone all the way down the stair and turned a corner, she suddenly saw a light appear ahead of them.

A soft yellow light coming from the end of the stairs penetrating all the way through the dark, which, when falling onto the ground, would be reflected in shaking waves.

She carefully studied this for a moment only to discover that the slight shaking on the surface was actually a piece of sewage. By looking at the lower half of the door which was buried in the water, it could be seen that the water level in the basement was about knee deep.

She slowly walked to the point between the staircase and the water, lifted both her feet from the ground, then slowly floated over to the door and throwing a probing glance to the inside.

And saw that the area behind the door was spacious and empty – the stone tower's basement was unbelievable huge, offering far more space than the area it had covered on the ground. She couldn't detect any burning torch which created the yellow light. Instead it seemed that the light came directly from the stones that were embedded in the walls. It roughly outlined the contours of the basement, while at the same time allowing Lightning to see

everything within the room.

A stone platform was erected in the middle of the chamber with several figures standing on top of it. According to their burly size and the carapace on their back, it seemed that they were all Devils. Luckily, the enemy hadn't yet noticed any movement coming from the door. Instead each of them were holding a spear in one hand and a large shield in the other, surrounding a blue stone erected on top of the platform.

At this moment, the cry for help was becoming clearer and clearer, as if someone was shouting directly into her ear.

“Save me, save me...”

Lightning had to swallow. What should I do next?

“We...”

“Go and save her, goo,” Maggie whispered into her ear.

“Eh?” The little girl got startled, “But there are several Devils... We cannot win against them!” She felt her hand that was firmly gripping the revolver begin to sweat, “It wouldn't be a problem if it was Sister Nightingale instead of me, but I alone... cannot do it.”

“Are they the demons you spoke off?” Maggie inquired, “It seems as if they are already dead, goo.”

“What? Dead?”

The moment her voice fell Maggie had already thrown herself into the air flying toward the stage, giving Lightning quite the scare, stunning for a moment. Otherwise, she would never have forgotten to pull her friend back. But when she finally came back to her senses Maggie had already thrown herself against one of those Devils. With no other option left, Lightning clenched her teeth and raised her gun; trying to remember all the important points that Nightingale had taught her.

But what she then saw, was completely unlike what she had expected, when the owl pecked a Devil twice, it crumbled down, just like a piece of broken stones after experiencing countless years of wind and frost, turning into a pile of floating ashes.

What’s going on? Lightning stepped beside Maggie and looked at the other three Devils in amazement.

Looking at them under the weak yellow light, she discovered that their bodies were covered with tiny cracks, and that spiders had spun nets between their legs, looking through their hideous helmets, she could see that their eyes and skin had turned pale, showing no traces of vitality. It was like this, she thought, within the dark light, an owl’s eyes are indeed several times better than mine, which allowed Maggie to be able to speak so confidently.

But before she could relax, Lightning’s gaze was already completely attracted by something else.

On the high platform surrounded by the Devils stood a huge cube. What had looked like a stone column from a distance actually turned out to be transparent crystal when seen from up close. Wrapped within the crystal cube was a woman who wore a gorgeous robe, her eyes were closed, her hands stretched open, and her hair spread out behind her as if it was still fluttering in the wind.

“Is she a witch, goo?” Maggie asked as she flew to the top of the crystal then fiercely pecked against the surface. However, this time it didn’t crumble into countless pieces, but instead sent out a sharp and clear hitting sound, “Very hard, goo!”

“I do not know,” Lightning murmured as she laid her hand against the crystal. A cold chill penetrated her skin – the crystal’s surface was covered with thick dust, which made it obvious that the woman had been in this “sarcophagus” for a very long time. Yet her expression was still so lifelike, her eyebrows were raised into a frown, looking a bit confused, but even more than that, they also seemed a bit anxious and worried.

“Save me...”

The sound could be heard once again, it was coming from behind the crystal.

Chapter 318 - Unknown

Roland scratched over the surface with the brush, writing a long paragraph on paper.

Before he came to this world, he had only drawn mechanical blueprints using the computer. At that time he had already thought that there would only be small chances where he would ever need to write characters using a pen, never did he expect to have to use this kind of ancient form of recording ever again.

Two papers filled with text laid next to his hand, containing the next plans for what he wanted to implement.

One plan was the large-scale production of sulfuric acid and the new equipment that was needed, made by the hands of Anna and Soraya. Instead of using lead for the reaction vessel, they would use the more robust and reliable iron together with an anti-corrosion coating. Furthermore, the vessels would be made three times larger than the previous trial version's.

Considering that at the present stage there was fundamentally no way to collect or purify the produced industrial waste gas (mainly used from combustion of sulfur and leakage of nitrogen oxides), Roland decided to place it at the southern end of the industrial park – far enough away from the residential area and the Redwater River. Furthermore, he planned to use stones so as to better isolate the building and also erect a chimney to raise the altitude at which the emissions would be released.

Increasing the output of sulfuric acid was of great help to enlarge the scale of concentrated nitric acid, so putting this equipment into production would be the most important task at present. The content of the document were instructions to Kyle Sichi to select a group of disciples who will be specializing in the production of sulfuric acid. In addition, Barov also needed to recruit some reliable local residents who could work as auxiliary handyman, raising the number of staff required for the chemical plant to around 100 people.

The second document was the formation of a public health care system.

To be honest, Roland wasn't familiar with this subject. Talking about it, he didn't even understand a single thing about modern medicine. However, this didn't prevent him from using his common sense to develop a plan which meets all of their current needs.

First of all, the biggest task of this department would be to give publicity to modern scientific discoveries. Things such as boiling the water before drinking it, the fact that meat has to be fully cooked before eating, the cause of illnesses and how they manage to spread, the difference between parasites and microbes, and so forth... Thanks to his growing prestige it wouldn't be difficult for him to get people to do what he wants, but if he wanted them to understand why they should do something, he would need someone to do the publication and education for him. It would be useless if they only spoke once about these things. Instead, it had to be repeated seven or eight times, maybe even dozens of times, like those slogans that were hanging at the edge of the field. If they continually spoke about it, their view would always become

accepted in the end.

The second part was encouraging the birthrate – since the City Hall only had a limited number of staff, Roland did not want to set up a separate family planning department. Thus he temporarily also placed this under the public health care's responsibility. The population was always the most scarce resource in this era, and the best way to confront this was by leading people to give birth to more lives. Nana's ability completely erased the risk of giving birth and many of the other thorny problems. And with her help, the post-natal survival rate would almost be around one hundred percent. In order to avoid the abandonment of baby girls, as well as restricting any changes of something like that happening in future, Roland developed a full subsidy and punishment policy. For example, the subsidy for baby girls was slightly higher than for baby boys, subsidies would be given in installments, and the abandonment of babies would be punished with fines or imprisonment, and so on.

The last point was the regulation of payment. Except for fertility treatment, the hospital would charge a fee in accordance with the amount of magic that Nana needed to use. This way it would reduce the little girl's burden as well as lay the foundation for the future hospital system. Roland had also already found the first person he wanted in charge of this department, Viscount Tigu Pine, Nana's father.

The third document, was currently in the state of being written, and was the most complex and far-reaching plan – it was the plan to establish Border Town as a city.

It was related to the problems created by the expansion of Border Town and the later merger with Longsong Stronghold. When that time came about, there would definitely be a demand for new laws concerning the governance of these two places, and both the judicial system and the public security system would have to be implemented. However, if he wanted to make these points watertight, merely relying on his own knowledge wouldn't be enough, thus Roland intended to draft a list first, and later discuss all the details with City Hall Premier Minister Barov.

After finishing the introductory part, Roland felt some pain in his wrist from all the writing so he went to the window to take a break.

Today's weather was very gloomy, and from morning to afternoon he had yet to see the sun. The sky was consistently being covered with dark clouds, and gave the impression that torrential rains would soon be coming. The chilly autumn wind swept over the castle backyard and Roland heard the olive leaves rustling.

At this moment, a black spot appeared on the horizon, flying in the direction of the castle.

"It's Lightning," Nightingale's voice came from behind him.

"She probably went to the Concealing Forest to pick some mushrooms again," Roland said with a smile. Usually, when they weren't on investigation duty, the goal of Lightning and Maggie's practice was left up to themselves. Therefore, it was entirely reasonable for them to not come back to the castle to eat lunch. According to the two, they would often be somewhere in the

woods looking for some eggs and honeycombs, or catching some strange animals to barbecue and eat. It was likely that all explorers would ultimately transform into [Bear Grylls](#).

Although the bird kissing mushrooms mainly grew on trees, he could not help but always think of the story called: ‘The mushroom plucking girl’.

“Your Highness, your... smile is a little strange.”

“Keke, I had to think of a little short story, do you want to hear it?”

“Ok?”

Roland cleared his throat, “Once upon a time, there was a little girl, she liked to gather mushrooms... Wait.” The shadow was slowly growing, but contrary to what they expected it didn’t fly over the castle, but instead lowered her altitude and went straight to the window of their office. Feeling shocked, Roland opened the window only seconds before Lightning directly flew into the room without stopping.

“Y-Your Highness!” Hardly had she landed when she already started to shout in excitement, “I found a witch!”

“A witch?” Roland asked full of curiosity, “Where?”

“In the Stone Tower hidden within the Concealing Forest,”

Lightning pointed to Maggie, who flew into the office just at that moment, “She can testify!”

“Googoo!” Maggie agreed.

“Stone Tower?” He frowned, “Carefully tell me what happened, from the beginning to the end.”

After listening to Lightning’s narration, Roland could not help but suck in a mouth of cold lump. This fellow is too bold, actually only taking a pigeon along she dares to explore a ruin which contained Devils. But what’s even more frightening, is that there is still a witch sealed inside these ruins. Of course, there is also the possibility that she could be an ordinary person sealed away by a witch... In any case, this is incredible news.

“What was the cry of help?”

“It is coming from this thing. I found it on a table behind her,” Lightning pulled a palm-sized square box from her pocket, at first glance it looked just like a small make-up mirror. However, when she opened the lid, Roland saw a red gem embedded inside of it, and when Lightning pulled a trigger next to it, the anxious sounding voice of a female suddenly appeared in everyone’s ears.

“Save me...”

Hearing the voice, Roland’s body began to shudder, the sound seemed to flicker, sometimes appearing near sometimes coming

from far off. It was indeed somewhat horrifying, if he imagined himself hearing this distressed voice after entering a dark underground chamber, he would certainly turn around and flee without any hesitation.

“The gem contains magic,” Nightingale appeared behind them and said in astonishment, “Within it, I can see a weak magic whirlpool, just like inside a witch’s body.”

Well, it seems to be a magic machine which continuously repeats previously spoken words. With this, the probability that the other person is a witch has increased. “Did you find any other stones inside the basement of the Stone Tower?”

“I didn’t take a closer look, also, many parts of the room were flooded,” Lightning shook her head. “At that time, I only thought about coming back and telling you about this news as soon as possible.”

“Never do something like this again, especially if you want to go to a dangerous place, you should first ask for permission,” Roland patted her head, then looked over at Nightingale, “Call Iron Axe and all of the members of the Witch Alliance over to the office. The exploration of the relics will be scheduled earlier than planned.”

Chapter 319 - Autumn Snow

After the others arrived, Roland informed them about Lightning's discoveries from beginning to end. "A transparent crystal coffin in the basement of an ancient ruin, without any sign of corrosion even though the environment is damp and moist, a magic stone which regularly released a call for help, and Devils broke into countless pieces upon contact... What do you all think about this?"

"You mean she could be a witch?" Anna pondered, "If she is still alive, we can probably learn more about what happened four hundred years ago."

"It is also possible that she isn't a witch, or even from that era," Scroll said after a moment of hesitation, "Furthermore..."

"Furthermore, she might not necessarily be on our side," Leaves added.

This sentence left Roland slightly shocked. Indeed, if these remains had been left by the Church, it is more than likely that the other side could be a member of the Church. Also, according to Lightning's description, she was wearing a gorgeous gown, which could mean that she was a high-ranking member. In the case that she was an ordinary person everything would be alright, but if she really is a witch, then dealing with her would be quite tricky.

Looking at the fights Ashes and Nightingale had been in, it could be seen that it was impossible to predict the kind of attack a witch

could perform beforehand. Furthermore, there was no clear dividing line to rank witches by strength. The extraordinaries might be unable to contend against witches with unique abilities even when they were wearing the God's Stone of Retaliation, and if combat witches were surprise attacked by support witches the situation would be equally worrying.

No one can guarantee that her ability won't pose a threat to the Witch Alliance if she held any malicious intent towards us... unless, we wake her within the influence of a God's Stone of Relation.

"You're all crazy, how can you even think that she won't be on our side?" Lily, grasping her forehead, could no longer sit still and decided to interrupt, "She should be from more than four hundred years ago, how could she still be alive today? It goes without saying that witches all die young, even if they possess the strong body of an extraordinary witch, they might never exceed a hundred years of age. All of you are thinking too much. Most likely it's just like I said, the moment we free her, the person inside will be just like the Devils and turn into dust."

"The reason why most witches die young is because of the so-called Demonic bite," Roland corrected, "A witch's physical fitness is generally much greater than the average person. Thus their actual lifespan should also be longer."

"The average person's lifespan is forty to fifty years, ah," Lily grunted, "Do you think everyone can live as long as a turtle can?"

The reason why the average lifespan is merely forty to fifty years

is because of an inadequate food supply and the low level of medical care; as long as the standard of daily living is increased, it should quickly increase by another twenty years. However, what she said is by no means utterly unjustified, Roland conceded, even if I add those twenty years, there still remains a gap to reach four hundred years... Even if we were turtles, I'm afraid we could never live for that long.

“But she is still alive, really,” Lightning cried aloud, “If you could've seen her, you'd immediately understand why I say so. Compared with the dead Devils she looks entirely different, her skin is smooth, and her lips are full of color. Tell them Maggie!”

“Goo! What Lightning said is true!”

“Alright, don't fight,” Wendy stood up and interrupted. “No matter if she is still alive or already dead, it's worth a try.”

“Are you sure?” Scroll asked unsure while knitting her brows.

“If she really is one of those Church's witches, as long as we hang a God's Stone of Relation around her before she wakes up it should be all right. Moreover, we also have Anna and Nightingale, so I believe she won't be able to cause much of a problem.” Wendy calmly said. “The key point is, it is possible that she might know about the incident that occurred more than four hundred years ago. The possibility that she can bring light into the darkness is worth the risk of rescuing her.”

Indeed, gathering more information about the Devils is very

critical for the survival of Border Town. Moreover, any news the Church desired to hide so much will surely be extremely unfavorable for them. Thus, if we can take hold of this knowledge ahead of time, there's a chance that it might help us take the initiative in the future battle.

Soon after, Anna and Nightingale also agreed to Wendy's view, so even though she still thought that it was wrong, Scroll no longer opposed them and the Witch Alliance came to a consensus.

"The First Army?" Roland looked toward Iron Axe.

"At most, you can send up to fifty people," the latter started to talk, "Your Highness, you already sent out several squads to assist City Hall to recruit refugees from the other regions, by now there are only around 500 left in Border Town. Even though Timothy has encountered Heaven's wrath, there's still a chance he might become desperate and launch a large-scale assault on the Western Territory. Thus, the First Army needs to have enough soldiers to guard against a possible attack from King's City."

"I understand," Roland said while nodding. A size of fifty people is a little small, if they happen to have to face a long-range attack from the Devils who can throw their spears from out of view, the damage caused could be quite serious. If I want to make up for this, in addition to Lightning's and Maggie's air surveillance, Sylvie's magic eye ability will also be essential. The ideal force to send out would be a ground force, supported by a team of witches stationed in a hot-air balloon. The witches will be responsible for observation and close combat battles, while the First Army will use their flintlocks to suppress the enemy over a long distance.

But then, the witches from Sleeping Island will also learn about the existence of the Deep Sleeper in the ruin. Roland thought through all the possibilities again and again, but in the end, he still decided to bring Sylvie along. After all, during this rescue mission, their safety would still be the most important consideration.

Just when he planned to arrange the rescue plan, Mystery Moon exhaled loudly before exclaiming, “Heavens... What is happening?”

Hearing her cry, everyone followed her gaze and looked out of the window, only to freeze up immediately.

Roland not daring to believe what he saw opened the window, then was finally forced to accept what he saw, beyond any of their expectations white flakes had begun to fall from the gloomy sky. They were hiding the sky and covering the earth, but completely lacked any sound. He stretched his hand out, catching a handful of white drops, which made an ice-cold sensation spread through his palm.

It's snow.

This is not normal... According to his knowledge, it would only snow in the Western Territory during winter, but now, it wasn't winter yet!

“It is normal for it to snows during the last month of autumn?: He looked at Iron Axe, but the latter wore a serious expression and

said, “I have been in Border Town for seven or eight years, and until now I have never experienced something like this.”

Once the snow began to descend from the heaven, it meant that the Months of Demons had arrived, and the sun would be buried behind a wall of clouds until its next brilliant bloom. During this time, the entire Western Territory would face the threat of demonic beasts. Not to mention the First Army, even when using a hot air balloon, the witches would still be in danger – at this time, the Concealing Forest was full of savage demonic beasts. So leaving the protection of the wall was an incredibly risky matter.

For now, he was forced to call a stop to the rescue mission and wait for the sky to clear up.

At the bottom of his heart, he felt that the early snow was likely an accident and would soon end. After all, the temperature was still at the average level of autumn and it also hadn't dropped by much.

However, three days later, the town was wrapped in silver, the distant mountains and woods were covered by a layer of white gauze. A beautiful scenery like this was definitely a rare view in his past, but Roland wasn't in the mood to appreciate the landscape.

Although the snowfall had weakened a lot, there were still some snowflakes falling from the sky. The First Army had also entered a state of full alertness, and has established regular patrols along the new wall. Furthermore, they had also erected a temporary camp at the foot of the new city wall, so that the soldiers would be able to quickly enter into battle. The temperature had changed almost

overnight, forcing Roland to change his clothes from his unlined garment to a knitted cotton coat.

On the fourth day, hearing the news from the front made Roland's heart drop.

The western city wall had suffered an attack from demonic beasts.

The Months of Demons had arrived more than one month ahead of time.

Chapter 320 - “Sleeping Spell”

Fjords, Sleeping Island.

“I never expected that the first guest of the ‘Sleeping Spell’ would actually be you,” Tilly smiled and said as she handed over a cup of boiling hot fish soup, “It was only due to your help that we could explore the Shadow Islands.”

“You are too polite,” Thunder answered as he received the fish soup, “Regarding the Mysterious Sea, even if I don’t receive any more commissions from you I would still like to go there a few more times for myself. To be honest, without your witches’ support, exploring the sea east of the Shadow Island would definitely be very dangerous for an explorer.” He sipped his fish soup, then let out a sigh, “Ah... it’s boiled black-tailed fish soup, it’s really delicious.”

In the Fjords, black tea and barley wine from black tea were considered to be unpopular, she was used to the custom of eating a bowl of ice cold frozen fish during midsummer, while here they drank a bowl of boiling hot fish soup when it got cold. They used a different method to cook the fish so the taste was not at all the same, this was something Tilly had gradually come to understand after arriving at Sleeping Island.

“Therefore, you were impatient to come and visit the Sleeping Spell?”

“The right thing to say would be that I can’t wait to go on the

next expedition,” Thunder straightforwardly stated. “The scene I saw last time when I looked through the observation mirror left me stunned – what is there on the land and for what reason is there a stone gate embedded inside that overhanging cliff? I wish I could fly there and go take a look.”

“Is that it...” Tilly also poured a cup of fish soup for herself, “You should already be aware that I’m planning to personally go to Border Town. One reason is to personally speak with the feudal lord and Witch Alliance, another reason is so that I can increase my knowledge by experiencing the Months of Demons in Border Town. You... don’t you want to come with us and take a look?”

For a moment Thunder was silent, but then he said with a broad grin, “Not yet. She should be having quite a good time over there. The way it is right now is also good... After all, the thing with exploring is, an accident can always happen one day. I already lost her mother, I really don’t want to also lose her. When that time comes, I ask you...”

“I will,” Tilly nodded, “After all, she is also one of our members.” Speaking until here she stopped and showed him a smile before continuing, “But business is business. Even though you have helped us a lot, you still have to take the costs to employ our witches on the table.”

“Of course, business is business, that is the way of the Fjords.” Thunder drained his bowl of fish soup before he laughingly agreed.

...

“So, who did he hire?” As she saw that Thunder had left the palace, Ashes entered the hall from outside, sitting cross-legged before Tilly.

“‘Magic Servant’ Molly, ‘The Door of Random’ Orbit, and ‘Puppet’ Remote Shadow.” Tilly spread out the contract, “In the end, the fee was set at four thousand and eight hundred gold royals. The payback is very generous, right? “

“Four thousand...” Ashes’ eyes became big, “Where did he get all the money from?”

“Don’t forget, Thunder is the most famous explorer in the Fjords,” the 5th Princes said laughingly, “No matter if it is the discovery of new routes or finding treasures when exploring new areas, all of it can bring in plenty of money. It was only because of this that he was repeatedly able to recruit such a large group of experienced sailors who would be willing to follow him to explore those mysterious and dangerous zones. But, with witches, he can greatly reduce the risk, and ever since ancient times it has always been thought as a good bargain when one can offset risk with money.”

“However, is that really okay?” Ashes asked unsure, “The establishment of a bounty guild will indeed bring a lot of wealth for Sleeping Island, but, at the same time, the abilities of us witches will be exposed; if this ever spread to the Church’s ears... “

“Sleeping Spell” was a new guild that Tilly had formed. From it,

explorers could hire suitable witches to help them complete their expeditions. Of course, in addition to the main project, they would also provide many convenient services, such as repairing damaged items, producing exquisite works of art, quickly constructing houses, providing insecticide for growing flowers and so on – as long as the witches don't use their ability to do anything evil, 'Sleeping Spell' will come to be accepted."

Of course, all this was only possible under the premise they announced their abilities publicly.

Tilly took Ashes' hand, "Didn't I already tell you? I do not care about those gold royals, but I hope that through the bounty guild more people will learn about Sleeping Island, and thus reach out to us to make a deal. Thunder has a saying I agree with, 'Fear comes from the unknown', the same is true for the witches. The fear of the people of the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms is nothing more than the slander of the Church and the result of their own ignorance.

"I can't force them to take the initiative to come in contact with us and try to understand us witches. Therefore, we can only step forward and actively go and promote ourselves. Telling them again and again that we witches aren't the Devil's messengers and that our abilities aren't strange and unpredictable – that they awaken from ordinary people, and that our essence is still that of a human being. 'Whenever there is a complete understanding of each other, there will no longer be anything left to fear'." She paused for a moment, then continued, "As for the Church, they have never cared what we are capable of. They simply send out their Army of Judges to capture us, they even occasionally send out the God's Punishment Army. Furthermore, regardless of our abilities, in

front of the God's Stones of Retaliation, they are all the same."

"I hope you are right," Ashes whispered, "I only know how to fight and kill, but regarding this matter I'm unable to help you."

"You have already helped me a lot," Tilly said showing her a reassuring smile. "If we want to further develop Sleeping Island, the most important thing for us will be to associate the Fjord's inhabitants with us witches from the island. The creation of mutual understanding will be a slow process, and I'm only doing all this in order to shorten the process as much as will be possible. In addition, the bounty guild can also play a special role in achieving our goal," she stuck out her tongue and revealed a sly smile before saying, "That's to find new uses for the seemingly useless abilities, so that support witches will no longer be discriminated against or think of their abilities as useless."

Hearing her reasoning Ashes began to laugh, "There are always so many reasons for your actions, whenever you reveal so many layers one after another it makes it hard for other people not to come to accept them."

"That's because I'm always saying the correct thing," Tilly said before changing the topic. "Maggie has not returned to Sleeping Island yet, could something have happened?"

"Perhaps something has delayed her travel," Ashes pondered about her next words, "Or..."

"What?"

“She might no longer want to come back,” Ashes said, while shrugging, “Compared to the Fjords, the living condition in Border Town is much better. In the past, I already told you not to send witches there. What will we do if Honey or Lotus also don’t want to come back?”

“Then we should head over there at once,” Tilly said.

“Oh, well, I will immediately get ready... what?” For a moment Ashes froze before she recovered enough to ask, “W-We are going to travel to them?”

The 5th Princess curled her lips, “Didn’t we reach an agreement that we will help them resist the demonic beasts, and, while doing this, we can also conventionally pick up the other witches. If we don’t have Lotus, the people coming with the Crescent Moon Bay immigration next year won’t have any houses to live in.”

“But right now, there is still one month left to the beginning of the winter, do we really have to go so soon?”

“We will have to spend a lot of time on the road. And if Border Town happens to encounter any trouble along the way we might have to help the witches as soon as possible, and...” She winked at Ashes, “I also want to go see what kind of person my disgusting older brother has turned into.”

Chapter 321 - The Law Of Border Town

Early in the morning, the cold woke Roland up. He climbed out from under his cold blanket, put on his wool coat, then immersed his feet into the warm water bucket.

This was one of the corrupting privileges which he could only enjoy as a Prince – every morning, a maid would put out a basin of hot water beside his bed, as well as a clean towel and a cup of warm milk which would warm up his body almost instantly.

Of course, compared to the powerful nobles who had other methods to constantly keep their beds warm, he felt that this was good enough. The former 4th Prince had always attempted to invite Tyre over with exactly that thought in mind, but unfortunately, he wasn't able to enjoy it before his death. However, the new Roland didn't enjoy this practice, so when the position became vacant he had filled it with an elderly but experienced maid instead. In fact, this choice proved to be the right one. Since nowadays there were so many witches staying inside the castle, but she still managed to keep the inside and outside of the castle in good order.

The fire in the fireplace had gone out long before, leaving only white flying ashes behind. Through the cracks in the open window, the cold wind blew into the room, it was so bone-chillingly cold that it was hard to believe that it was still autumn. Roland dried his feet, then washed the rest of his body with another tub of hot water before going over to the window and closing the small gap he had opened through the night.

Even though open fireplaces were very common in this era, he was still worried about the issue of carbon monoxide poisoning and thus he always left a small gap open before he went to bed. This way, with the fire burning the temperature could be kept all the way through the first half of the night, but, after the fire went out there was no difference between the temperature inside and outside when morning came.

I have to come up with an idea to solve this problem, Roland thought, or I won't be able to sleep in the future.

After eating breakfast, Roland took Nightingale, his Chief Knight, and his personal guards on a routine inspection of the city walls.

The vast expanse of grass between the new city wall and the old city has become a vast expanse of white. As they walked over all the thick snow the soles of their shoes made crunching noises.

Lifting his head, he saw a pale gray sky and falling snowflakes that occasionally came floating into the gap between his coat and his neck, bringing with it traces of coldness. He knew that it was very likely that this kind of weather would continue until spring next year... or it might even be longer.

“How is the situation at the defense line?”

“It's much better than the last time,” Carter Lannis said, looking relaxed, “Most soldiers of the First Army have already gathered experience on the battlefield. Furthermore, now that we have

these revolving rifles, ten guards are already enough to protect about one hundred meters of the city wall, and suppress all the demonic beasts that appear at the feet of the wall. In addition, compared to the old stone wall, the new wall is about half a meter higher, which is a height that is very difficult for a wolf to reach. Due to this, the defense has turned into mere shooting practice for the soldiers. As long as no mixed species appear these monsters won't ever be able to step one foot past the defense line."

"It seems everything is well."

As Roland boarded the wall, all the soldiers he came across gave him a salute, standing straight with their head held high and their chest out. Just by looking at their spirits, it was already clear that the soldiers had completely changed from the time they spent as part of the militia. At that time, although they stood side by side on the wall, seemingly uniformly stabbing with their pike, it was in truth nothing more than a conditioned reflex formed after repeated training. The expression in their eyes was war numb, their movements were all stiff, and when someone took a closer look they would immediately see that most of them were trembling slightly.

But the soldier's eyes at this moment were brimming with self-confidence. After going through the ceremony, they immediately turned around and continued to monitor the battlefield.

Walking along the city wall toward the Concealing Forest, the area became much livelier.

The temporary shelters for the serfs and refugees was arranged

within this area. When Roland looked down from the top of the wall, it seems as if many slopes were arranged in lines parallel to the wall, looking like upward and downwards moving waves. Each of those slopes offered a place for ten rooms, with an inner structure that was identical to that of a cave. The thick walls were able to maintain the indoor temperature, while the kang heated the room and a linen cover at the entry kept the cold out.

The whole area was divided into two blocks, the one close to the wall was called the West Side and was used to shelter the refugees; while the East Side set further away from the wall has been assigned to the serfs.

Every day the City Hall would send out people to distribute food and charcoal, while the refugees had to take over the task of delivering for the soldiers of the First Army who were protecting the walls. As for the serfs, most of them had all the wheat they needed. With the exception of some people who went out to look for a job to earn some extra money, the others all rarely left their warm houses.

At this moment, suddenly a fierce argument broke out at the junction between the East and West side. When Roland became aware of it he went over and saw a group of people standing in the middle of the road that passed through the residential area that were bust arguing out loud. One of them wore a blue and white uniform and seemed to be a clerk who worked in City Hall. It didn't take long for the verbal quarrel to escalate into a fight, both sides began to push each other and strike one another, turning the whole scene into a mess.

“Your Highness,” Carter asked.

“Let’s go take a look,” Roland agreed.

When they reached the place where the disruption was happening the chief knight took the lead and went straight into the fighting crowd, immediately knocking down two or three of the trouble makers. And as Roland’s personal guards, having already drawn their swords shouted out for everyone to stop, the scene soon fell back under control.

Discovering that the newly arrived people were actually the Lord’s men, the two quarreling sides fell immediately on their knees just like breaking waves.

“What is your name?” Roland frowned as he asked the clerk who had two punch marks on his face, “What’s going on here? Who attacked you first?”

“Your Highness, my name is Khoya Harvie,” he cried and hid his face with his hands. “It was that damned refugee who hit me first, it’s the man dressed in brown linen! I was still busy distributing food when he rushed up to me like a dog who’d gone mad.”

Hearing Khoya’s words and after being pointed out, the man wearing refugee clothes turned and said, “Your Highness, things didn’t happen as he described it. These people and the serfs conspired to blackmail us. Every time they distribute porridge they collect money, but, at the time you took us in you clearly told us that it would be free!”

Hearing him speak left Roland slightly surprised. All of the refugees who had come from the east coast had been combed through by the City Hall; they'd already sorted out all of the craftsmen, people with special abilities, or those who were literate. Those were moved to the inner circle, so the remaining people here should supposedly be ordinary civilians. But judging by his tone of voice and his choice of words it didn't resemble a civilian at all.

In contrast, it was the man from the city hall who had used words like 'damned dog' and other insults, which left a really disappointing appearance. Since he had a well-known family name... in all likelihood, he was one of Duke Ryan's former people.

"I have said that before you are officially incorporated into Border Town the porridge and shelter will all be free of charge," Roland repeated once again in front of the refugees. "Today, those words are still valid!"

"His Highness is merciful!"

"Long live the Lord!"

"Thank you, Your Highness!"

The refugees began to shout while kowtowing.

But at the same time, Khoya Harvie's face turned livid.

“However, fights within the inner territory resulting in injuries are a violation of the law. In particular, attacking a member of the City Hall,” Roland said, then ordered his personal guards, “Take all the refugees and serfs who started the fight and bring them to the castle, I will personally try this fight.”

He paused, and then looked at Khoya with interest, “I would also like to ask you about this matter of charging for the porridge.”

Chapter 322 - Western Territory Security Bureau

Returning to the castle hall, Roland went to sit in the Lord's seat that was overlooking the subjects gathered within the hall beneath him.

In his memory, the only time the 4th Prince has ever used his right to exercise a trial was the first time he had come to Border Town. Later, after his fallout with the nobles and his dissatisfaction with his current lifestyle in general, he had thrown everything into the hands of Barov, never asking him anything about it.

Seeing that everyone was present, Roland called for the trial to begin.

At first, he let all sides state their case, then he asked them questions of his own – with Nightingale there secretly assisting him it wasn't necessary for him to determine who was deliberately lying and who spoke insincerely, nor did he need to have the meticulous mind of a grim reaper, concluding who was responsible became effortless and simple.

Soon the whole truth of the story was revealed.

At heart, Khoya Harvie was unwilling to accept that he was deprived of his identity as a knight, at the same time he had also grown tired of the tedious writing work at the City Hall, which resulted into a stomach full of resentment against the refugees. He

made use of the opportunity presented by the distribution of the wheat porridge to purposely charge the refugees a fee and instigate dispute between both sides. He deliberately told them that it was because the serfs didn't turn over all their grain that the wheat stock wasn't enough and for that reason they could not give out porridge free of charge.

In fact, what made Roland the most aggravated was that Khoya was only able to charge them for several days because he had been wearing the eye-catching uniform of the City Hall and that the refugees had been worried about the possibility of retaliation from officials that they kept silent. Until today, when a refugee named Vader had stepped out in protest against his behavior, and from this commotion everything had then been exposed.

When Roland finally understood the whole situation he felt relieved.

An organization on the rise should be brimming with vitality, full of youthful energy. Later on, when the situation was more stable, corruption and rigidity would be inevitable, but that should only be something that happens after the unification with Longsong Stronghold. If those problems were to appear in the beginning, then the organization would be doomed to never go very far.

However, it now appeared that Khoya had acted on his own and that none of the other officials of the City Hall had been related to this matter. Furthermore, it was only a matter limited to extorting money, and not the thing he had feared the most, which was serfs selling and reselling grain in private.

Of course, to some extents, Roland was also the one responsible that the situation had develop to this. Due to City Hall originally being so desperately short of manpower, Roland had placed the surrendered Knights under Barov after only giving them a warning about the circumstances and no further screening or training. The result showed that not everyone had been able to accept the job without complaint or bare the great mental pain of dropping in rank from a knight to a civilian.

Roland called Barov to his side and asked him in a low voice: “What would other Lords do in this case?”

“Your Highness, there are two possibilities,” the latter respectfully replied, “If the offender is a nobleman, after paying a few gold royals the situation would be turned over and they could be let go without any further punishment. While the punishment for a civilian attacking a noble can be big or small, from cutting off one hand to flogging.”

“But Khoya is no nobleman,” the Prince responded, “I have deprived him of his title.”

“Yes, that’s true, Your Highness. In this way, the disposition will be based entirely on the mood of the Lord.”

“There are no fixed numbers?”

Barov shook his head.

Hearing this Roland began to frown, that it is entirely dependant on the mood of the Lord means that in the eyes of the nobility it doesn't matter how civilians are treated, they do not consider them as "people" at all.

"In addition to cutting off hands, breaking feet, whipping and pulling fingernails are there any common punishments? For example, imprisonment?"

"Imprisonment?" Barov asked startled, "You mean to simply lock them away? What kind of punishment would that be? A prison is only a temporary place for holding the sinner, sooner or later they will be brought to trial and their case will be closed. During their imprisonment, you have to feed them the whole time, I'm afraid that it would be a reward for some people."

Well, it seems that the general term of imprisonment used in later generation won't be very useful here. After thinking about it for a moment, Roland decided to follow the rules of the castle. He stood up, and let his gaze wander over the people gathered beneath him, "I'm ready to give my verdict now."

"Khoya Harvie, because of dereliction of duty, extortion of refugees, you are abolished of your position within City Hall, sentenced to work in the mine for ten years, and to be fined with three times the amount you have stolen.

"Vader, as the first to attack a City Hall officer you will be sentenced to ten lashes with the whip.

“All the other refugees and serfs involved in the fighting are fined two silver royals or five lashes with a whip.

“The distribution of the wheat porridge will continue to be free of charge, all previous extorted money will be refunded.” He looked to the Prime Minister of the City Hall, “You will carry out the above ruling and also announce the result to the people in the temporary residential area.”

“As you command, Your Royal Highness,” Barov said.

Back to the office, Roland leaned against the back of the chair and stretched, he then felt a pair of hands resting on his shoulders and gently massaged them.

Closing his eyes Roland enjoyed a moment of leisure.

This matter had made Roland realize that with the increasing number of people in the city, the authority of the City Hall had also expanded rapidly and that they might already have to face the problem of internal regulation by now.

He did not want to set up an institution similar to the prosecutor's office, but he was also unwilling to set up an independent public security bureau of later generations. Not only would the former need a larger number of literacy personnel, they were also prone to attack each other, interfere in the commission of the policies, the appointing and expelling systems of government, and hinder the implementation of new policies. While the latter weakened the Lord's authority in disguise. It

would still be better if he kept those powers, such as the formulation and interpretation of the law and holding a trial, in his own hands.

What he needed was a simple yet effective System which didn't require many people to play the role of a supervising organization.

Roland took hold of one of the hands placed on his shoulders.

Feeling her hand being grasped, Nightingale stepped out of the fog and sat on the edge of the table while holding the Prince's hand, she then crooked her head and asked: "What's up?"

Her slender legs dangled from the table, swaying in the air, forming a perfect curve with her high tube moccasins and her close-fitting pants.

Roland coughed twice, "I intend to set up a new department which will supervise the City Hall, as well as arrest other people who attempt to harm the Western Territory or destabilize the community. This department only needs to report to me and will be completely independent of the City Hall or the First Army." Emphasizing every word Roland went on, "I will name it the "Western Territory Security Bureau" and I want the first supervisor to be you."

"Me?" Nightingale blinked confusedly.

"That's right, only you can easily distinguish the truth of the

spoken words. Furthermore, any cheats or tricks will be meaningless in front of you, “Roland nodded. “How is it? If you wish, I can provide you with my own afternoon tea’s ice cream during winter, and also...”

Nightingale gently pinched his hand, “It’s unnecessary to say that, I promise I will comply – anything, as long as it is something you want me to do.”

“...” Roland suddenly felt a bit embarrassed.

She laughed, but didn’t let the silence continue for too long and instead said, “But what should I do?”

“Well, the supervising part will be very simple,” the Prince got his emotion back under his control, “I will set up an accusation box at the entrance to the castle area, thus you only have to check the contents of the reporting letters inside.”

If he wanted to solve the problem in the least costly way, it would be to use the masses to supervise, as well as make the City Hall supervise itself. Just like last year when they had caught the spies during the Months of Demons.

For future generations, this method wouldn’t be easy enough to use. No matter if it was the reported target or the reporter themselves, it would need a lot of effort to verify. Simultaneously, there could also be cases of false reports, mistaken reports about correct situations, and not to mention deliberate framing. But in front of Nightingale’s ability these shortcomings wouldn’t be a

problem. Verifying the information would be very easy for her, she merely had to question the accuser in person – truthful reports would be rewarded while false accusations and false reports would be punished. Centering the implementation around these two points, the system was bound to be extremely efficient.

“As for maintaining the stability of the Western Territory, and eliminating threats and hidden dangers, it will be more resemblant of a national intelligence system. However, for this, I will slowly extend your hands until your eyes are spread over the whole of the Western Territory.”

Chapter 323 - Ministry Of Public Security

Roland already had a rough plan of the future public security system for his territory.

At present, the town had a population of about twenty thousand. Besides the local indigenous people, there were also people who had immigrated from Longsong Stronghold as well as the refugees who have escaped from the Eastern Region. By the time the messengers sent by Barov came back, they might already have brought people from the Northern or Southern Region of the kingdom and as a result would further complicate the cultures that the population consists of. With all the different morals, conflicts like what had happened today would only become more and more common.

He would therefore need to establish a public security system to separate the First Army's task of patrolling from internal and external violence. He had already thought of this issue before but had not thought of anything definite because of how few staff he had. However, now that he had the First Army to fight against the demonic beasts and the population was growing very rapidly, the time to implement his plan had come.

By formulating and interpreting the laws himself and holding trials of major crimes, he would be the first and also the final instance; the public security would capture criminals according to the law while also settling civil disputes. The Security Bureau would be responsible for maintaining the purity of the system and to effectively prevent the corruption of the systems, they would also use public security personnel to carry out the corruption cleaning operations and in that way save on human resources. This

was the outline for Roland's security system.

The ideal situation would be if he could first try to run the security system in Border Town, and by the time he had established Border Town as a city next year he would expand the system to the whole of the Western Territory.

By then, no matter if it was an autonomous Lord's territory or not, they would all have to implement the same set of laws and accept the rule of a unified department. Only he alone would be able to stand above the law.

As the mightiest noble of the Western Territory, Roland knew that it was unrealistic to say that everyone was equal before the law, nor could he abolish the aristocracy. But at least he could make sure that the traditional system of feudal fiefdom does not exist within his city anymore. If they wanted to get the protection of the Western Territory, they would have to hand over their power of self-governance.

As for the head of the Ministry of Public Security, Roland already had the right person in mind for that.

Someone filled with a strong sense of justice while also not being pedantic, Carter Lannis would be a fitting choice.

*

When Vader stumbled back to his temporary residence, old man

Kukasim came out to welcome him.

“You... never mind.”

“It’s tolerable,” Vader grumbled, “His Highness only sentenced me with a punishment of ten whips.”

“Let me take a look,” Kukasim eagerly stepped forward.

“Go back to the house,” Vader said as he walked into the house where the warmth inside immediately dispelled the chill within his body. As the door closed, it appeared as if the inside and outside were two completely different worlds. Compared to the wooden sheds from before which would let through wind and rain, this somewhat low and narrow mud house gave people a sense of comfort.

That’s right, the locals seem to call this house ‘cave dwelling’.

The old man let him lie on the kang, and when he tore off the clothes at Vander’s back he couldn’t help but suck in a mouth of cold air.

“Your back is covered with blood, I’ll go get some ash to cover it.”

“Wait, there is no need. It’s only dried blood left from from after the torture, the blood has already stopped flowing long ago.” He had to repeatedly pause as he spoke, “Sir Knight has said that it

would be best to keep it open like this and to wait for two or three days by which time the wound will have already healed.”

“Two or three days?” Kukasim shook his head in fear, “No, son, by then you may have already fallen into a high fever and your back will swell up into a ball. Even if you might have a strong body, you will still need at least a week to recover. You of all people should be aware of what happens when a disease flares up.”

“You may not believe it,” he licked his dried lips. “But I don’t feel much pain from the wounds on my back. On the contrary, I feel a cool and itchy feeling, which is a sign that its healing. After they finished the whipping they splashed a bucket of water on my back...”

“Saltwater?” The old man frowned.

“At the beginning, I had the same thought, but the scorch I expected did not come,” Vader laughed twice, “The Knight executing the penalty said that this can eliminate all disease-causing microorganism. If I want to let my wounds heal quickly, I shouldn’t do anything superfluous with it, and allow it to dry.”

“What are those disease causing micro... organism?”

“Microorganism,” he curled his lips, “Who knows what they are, most probably something related to those witches.”

The old man lowered his head, then after a long time he opened

his mouth again: “You shouldn’t have stepped forward because of me, if it is only words it’s still bearable...”

“If we were to keep on enduring it, we would have to suffer under an even more severe treatment. I know that kind of person, they have the morality and appearance similar to many of the nobles living in King’s City,” Vader spat. “I’ve heard that in this area the snow will last for several months, but the money we have won’t last until then.” He paused, “and... I also deliberately picked that time to hit him.”

“Caused, deliberately?” Kukasim asked disbelievingly.

“Yes. After all, the Prince will always appear on the west side of the city wall at this time of the day. Since he had promised to give us free food, he must hate this kind of behavior which is damaging his reputation. Thus, this was also the most effective way. If we had merely caused a simple fight, it wouldn’t be certain that it would ever reach His Highness’ ear. After all, Kohya Harvie might have received instructions from others. So if any of the City Hall officers wanted to suppress news about this, it would become meaningless regardless of what we said.”

“But he could also have been instructed by His Highness...”

“The possibility that this was the case was very low. If His Royal Highness wanted to save his money, then the three meals he promised would be reduced to two meals. Furthermore, I have inquired about him in advance and no matter whether it is the local residents or those serfs, all of them praise His Highness’ kindness and wisdom.” Vader said, smiling proudly. “You see, I

wasn't gambling or anything like that, right?"

"Originally... so that's how it is," the old man sighed in relief, "It seems you really have considered everything already."

But there was also a part I hadn't guessed, Vader thought, that was the penalty.

Working for ten years as a patrol officer in Valencia, he had a profound understanding of the ugliness hidden beneath the city's glamorous appearance. There were more than a dozen of nobles who have used their power to blackmail, even among the ranks of the patrols. Therefore, there wasn't much need for him to want to punish these nobles.

His Royal Highness's reaction had been basically the same as what he had expected, it was only that the amount of punishment was beyond his expectation.

In this kind of circumstances, the Lords who mind their reputation would have ruled the suppressor as the innocent party, but he instead had punished everyone. It seemed that His Highness cared more about the system than of his reputation.

For a Lord, accustomed to doing as he pleased to care so much for his subjects, this was something that was rarely seen.

"What are you going to do next?" The old man asked after a moment of silence.

“Just like Sir Knight had said, rest for two days, then continue as before, and help those guys carrying those strange weapons by delivering groceries.”

“You could have lived a decent life together with the craftsmen in the inner city.”

“But it would be impossible for you to get in, Kukasim. So, stop talking about this,” Vader said, shaking his head. “I refuse to leave you behind.”

This old man was neither his family nor his elder. Half a year ago, the other had still been a prisoner kept in prison. Everyone knew that the old man had been pushed forward by the black street rats to act as a scapegoat, but this matter appeared too often that the patrol had become too lazy to take notice of it anymore. Later, when a group of pirates looted Valencia, Vader had believed that he would die within the turmoil, but in that critical juncture, the old man hidden within the prison had covered him with his stinking bed sheets which in the end allowed him to luckily escape.

Vader did not expect that he would be saved by one of those prisoners he was normally so unwilling to look at. But at that moment he had finally come to understand that there was essential no difference between how they acted and the disgusting nobility.

The other two people in the room were both aware of Kukasim's identity, but since he was looking after him they didn't dare to touch him. However, in case he left, they would certainly try and

make trouble for the old man.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine.” Vader patted his counterpart’s shoulders.

Two days later, he heard the news from the inner city that His Highness was recruiting for the positions in public security.

Chapter 324 - Signs Of The Sea

“Hey, girls, do any of you want a bowl of fish soup?” Captain Jack asked after stretching his head into the cabin, as smoke curled up from the pipe he held in the corner of his mouth, “A lucky fellow caught a large tailless trout just a moment ago.”

“Thank you,” Tilly Wimbledon nodded. “We’ll come over right away.”

“Is it fish soup again?” Ashes said regretfully after the Captain left, “Where in the world is such tasteless fish soup even remotely tasty?”

“You can ask for a little salt if you want to add it to the soup,” Breeze laughingly said. “Pepper would also be alright, but that’s more expensive. I’m afraid Mr. Jack won’t want to give it to you.”

“Don’t put anything into the soup. Boiled soup keeps its original flavor, while also keeping the quality of the food itself,” Andrea said, gracefully sorting her long light golden hair, “Lady Tilly, I would presume we were supposed to go to the captain’s room.”

“As long as it is something warm we should go over right away,” Shavi, who had the shortest stature of all of them, muttered, “My toes are stiff.”

Following along the stairs the group entered the captain’s cabin in the Charming Beauty. One Eye Jack stood near the porthole, looking at the white track of the rolling waves spreading out

behind the ship.

“This damn weather, how can it suddenly become so cold?” He asked, puffing out a cloud of white smoke, “Oh You Three Gods, it’s supposed to currently be mid-autumn, ah~.”

“Maybe the gods just fell asleep?” Ashes said and shrugged.

“Pei Pei, you can’t say words like that when you are in the middle of the sea ,” Captain Jack grinned, “The Emperor of the Sea is always keeping his eyes on us,” he said and put his hands on his stomach before making a praising gesture, “Let it be for now, we shouldn’t think too much of it. Let’s first fill our bellies with warm fish soup.”

In order to fully enjoy the warm food in the captain’s room, he did not hesitate to open a big hole in the floor, put a brazier frame in the middle, and fill the space that was left with sand. In this way he could keep the heat isolated and avoid igniting the whole ship.

A large pot of soup was bubbling above the brazier, making a rumbling sound and filling the room with an overflowing fragrance.

The six people took their shoes off and sat in a circle around the brazier. They buried their feet in the warm sand, completely surrounding their ice-cold toes with the hot gravel and enjoying the warmth from the burning charcoal.

Tilly received the fish soup that the captain had offered her and gently blew on the piping hot soup to cool it. Compared to the milky white surface of boiled black tail fish soup, this bowl of soup was a deep yellow with oil bubbles floating on its surface, giving it a crystal sheen when reflecting the light.

When she occasionally saw some green and white specks within the soup, she knew that the captain had taken some goods from his own reserves. After all, due to frequently sailing for several months on end, it resulted in that the crew could hardly ever eat fresh vegetables and fruits. Thus, these soft green onions were obviously some vegetables which he had deliberately preserved within iced saltpeter. The fragrance of the green onions neutralized the fish's own fishy smell, and harmoniously mixed in with the ginger and ale, making it taste all the more rich and delicious.

When the soup became cold enough that she wouldn't burn her tongue, Tilly drank a small sip, before pausing and gently blowing again. She could clearly feel every small mouthful of it, after drinking the soup a warm current flowed along her throat and into her stomach, where it rested, releasing a nice and warm feeling.

The chilliness soon faded, almost as if her body was experiencing a slight fever.

"Try and add some pepper," Jack said, pointing at the seasoning jar standing next to the brazier, "In addition to enhancing its taste even more, it will also especially expel the cold. It's even more effective than wine."

“Although tasting its original flavor is the true meaning of eating food, but I must say, the added ingredients are perfect, bringing out the flavor to perfection,” Andrea praised.

“Won’t you drink something?” Tilly asked while looking at Ashes.

The latter waved her hand, “I would better let it be, I’m really unable to stomach the fishy taste.”

At first, Tilly was also unable to accept the habit of the people of the Fjords who loved eating fish for every meal. They ate it in all kinds of variations, roasted, boiled, and not to forget deep fried. Furthermore, there was also something similar to frozen fish, fish sauce, caviar and other strange preparations... However, after she had forced herself to eat it several times during formal banquets, she’d discovered that its taste was quite good and that once she became familiar with the taste of the sea it could instead further serve as a contrast for the food’s tastiness. Like those sun dried fish, roasted cuttlefish and even the fried fish with its pungent smell, was something she could by now enjoy eating.

“Our High and Mighty Miss Ashes’ appetite has already been corrupted by Border Town’s barbarous cooking,” Andrea said, “It is a pity that the taste of spices and fine salt not only made her lose her ability to identify what’s delicious. It now seems that not even any of her courage is left.”

“What did you say?” Ashes glared at Andrea.

“Why, isn’t it like this?” Andrea issued a series of laughs, “Just a little fishy smell is enough to make you flinch. Willful like a little girl, how do you expect us to believe that you will bravely step forward when Tilly needs it?”

“So it was actually like that... it seems you want to provoke me to play with you,” Ashes voice suddenly became gentle, “Give up, Border Town has a terrible weapon. Far more powerful than your arrows. Even then, I was still able to win the duel. So, if you would like to take over the post of Tilly’s personal guard from me, you will still need to practice for a few more years...” She paused, “I misspoke, you would have to practice your whole lifetime.”

“You –!”

The corner of Ashes’ mouth rose as she said, “Besides, the fine food that His Highness Roland invented was not only the layering of spices and salt, only when you try it will you be able to understand. Remember, don’t let your drool drip on your clothes, Lady Tilly cannot afford to lose face.”

“Nonsense, it will be you!”

Tilly could not help but smile. These two witches were Sleeping Islands most powerful combat witches. They would often fight against each other to determine who would be number one, Tilly knew however, no matter if it was Ashes or Andrea, they were also her best subordinates. During the time of danger, they wouldn’t hesitate to fight side by side, both working together to build the impregnable walls surrounding Sleeping Island.

The two's quarreling lived up the atmosphere in the room, and as she saw the scene, Tilly couldn't help but think of the five witches she had sent to Border Town. Are they doing well in my brother's place?

At this moment, the Charming Beauty suddenly began to shake violently.

"Be careful!" Ashes shouted as she grasped the 5th Princess. The iron cooking pot on top of the brazier turned over and the soup that poured out put out the charcoal fire. The brazier standing on the wok was overturned to the ground, the soup poured out the charcoal fire, while the fish meat ended up on the ground.

A sharp whistle came from outside.

"Enemy attack!"

A sailor rushed into the captain's room and shouted, "Captain sir, Sea Ghosts are coming! More than one!"

Sea Ghost... isn't that another name for demonic beasts Tilly got shocked, how can they even come to this place?

As the group ran out of the cabin, they could see more than a dozen fish monster with crabs legs entering the deck, and some that were still climbing up the two sides of the Charming Beauty. With their six legs they moved fast and nimble like cockroaches,

wielding a humanoid arm on both sides of their head; their humanoid arms had an amazing strength, which could easily break a seaman's neck.

“Since you are unwilling to accept my challenge, we will have to compete,” Andrea shouted as she snapped her fingers. Her fingers began emitting a golden light which turned into a bow firmly held in her hand, “The one who kills the most monster is the strongest.”

“No matter,” Ashes countered as she pulled her strange sword from her back, “I’m on.”

Chapter 325 - Arrow Of Light

Tilly poured her magic into the flying magic stone then jumped into the air, from where she could overlook the entire deck.

The crew of the Charming Beauty was mostly formed out of experienced sailors, so after the initial panic subsided one after another they picked up their weapons and grouped together to fight against the demonic beasts to gradually guide them to the aft of the ship. It was obvious that it would be impossible for them to defeat such a large number of enemies with their strength alone, so their only hope lay in the witches that were together with them on board.

When Ashes joined the battle the situation quickly changed.

She was like a gust of wind, causing all the monsters to cry and scream as she passed. Any demonic beasts daring to face her sword met with a clean cut; leaving with severed limbs scattered all across the deck.

Unwilling to fall behind, Andrea released one arrow after another. Her magic longbow allowed her to use any object at hand as an arrow and release it with an alarming power and accuracy. So she rarely prepared a conventional feather arrow, but rather a bag of glass beads. The glass beads were solid enough that it could cross a distance of twenty paces and penetrate the demonic beast's head, turning the brain into a mass of paste, only allowing them to weakly twitch before turning limp, without even managing to release a single miserable cry.

Breeze and Shavi pushed their way back and forth over the deck and rescued the injured sailors. Under the protection of an invisible barrier, the demonic beasts weren't even able to come close to them.

Even on seeing the demonic beasts quickly being beheaded, and their number rapidly beginning to dwindle, Tilly still did not dare to relax.

These fish-shaped monsters were clearly not enough to cause the violent shaking that the Charming Beauty had felt at the beginning. Instead, it was as if there was a huge monster hitting the bottom of the ship from below. Without the protection from Molly's servant, the force would have been strong enough to turn the ship into a piles of broken wood floating in the sea if it managed to hit the ship a few more time. At that time, the witches would just barely be able to protect themselves while probably only a few seamen would be able to escape ending up in a fish belly.

Just like she had expected, the moment Ashes' sword had cut down the last demonic beast, a gigantic shadow, which was much too large to be a fish, appeared in the water in front of the ship's hull. It quickly approached them and once again bumped into the Charming Beauty.

"Be careful!" She shouted.

Her voice had hardly fallen when the shadow once again passed beneath the bottom of the ship, causing the sailboat to start violently shaking. Two masts began to issue a series of cracking

sounds, as if they would come crashing down at any moment. Fortunately, the shadow didn't attempt another attack, and instead quickly disappeared into the depths from where it could attack the Charming Beauty with its back, shaping its knife and fork for a satisfying meal.

After dropping down back on the deck, Tilly quickly summarized the situation.

"We must force it out of the sea, otherwise sooner or later this damn monster will manage to sink the ship." Ashes declared with a frown.

"I'll try it," Shavi said. "Since it's coming from beneath when it hits the bottom of the ship, as long as it gets in close enough, I could use my barrier to stop it."

"Oh Emperor of the Sea above," Old Jack cried out as he wiped the sweat from his forehead, "If it's really as huge as Lady Tilly said, I'm afraid that ordinary attacks would be unlikely to work against it. So how would you kill it, even if you are able to force it out of the sea--"

"Just let me do it," Andrea combed her loose hair back behind her ears as she showed them a confident smile. "There is no enemy able to resist my full power within a distance of ten steps."

It wasn't long before the shadow appeared again, but this time it had changed direction and was coming at them from the stern of the Charming Beauty.

Monitoring the situation from high up in the air, Tilly immediately called out a warning. When Shavi heard her she quickly ran into position and jumped off the ship. Previously she had firmly tied a hemp rope around her waist, while the other end was in Ashes' hand, who could use it to control Shavi's falling height.

As the shadow approached, Shavi quickly opened her barrier, splitting the dusky sea water, as if it was separated by something invisible.

As the monster rushed into the barrier, its huge bulk stopped and Shavi let out a pressured groan, her hands were hanging down beside her body, as if she was using an enormous amount of strength. Looking down, the shadow beneath her feet was rapidly expanding, and the water was rising violently.

“Quickly pull her up!” Tilly shouted as she rushed downwards.

Using all her power, Ashes single-handed pulled on her end of the rope. The moment Shavi fell on the deck, a huge sea monster came roaring out of the water, causing waves which made the Charming Beauty sway heavily. The monster looked like a mixture between a shark and an octopus, with a triangular head which was covered with several tentacles, all of which shot straight toward the deck.

Even without hearing its cry it became clear that the unfathomable impact has made it incomparably angry, as it let its adult thigh sized tentacles rain down onto the ship, trying to break

everything apart, but even from the beginning up until the end it had no way to penetrate Shavi's defense.

"Andrea!" Ashes bent down, entwined her fingers and formed a step with her hands.

"Coming," the latter set a foot onto Ashes' palms and shouted, "Give me everything you've got!"

Thrown by extraordinary power into the air, Andrea turned into an arc and within the blink of an eye, she had already appeared above the monster's head.

She summoned her magical longbow, pulling the string to its fullest, unexpectedly there were flashes of light breaking out between the bow and its string. Rather than flashes of light, it seemed as if the sun had actually come out from behind the clouds, reflecting across the sea's surface in a golden luster.

"Go!"

The light flashed, and with an ear-piercing cry an arrow, made purely out of magic, it drilled right into the monster body like a strike of thunder. The monster's gray-brown skin suddenly swelled, and golden cracks appeared all over its body, before finally, with a loud explosion, it shattered.

The huge explosion created ripples across the surface of the sea. Its blood, which was as black as ink, dyed the sea a pitch-black,

while viscera came falling from the sky like rain. The previously attacking tentacles all curled up and sunk back into the sea together with pieces of the monster's blown up head.

Andrea crashed into the sea.

“Ah... Help, help I can't swim! Guru, who... who's going to pull me out?!”

Ashes glanced toward the seemingly tired Shiva before she helplessly sighed. “She is indeed only a handsome fool,” she said then unhooked the sword on her back and jumped into the sea to swim to Andrea's side.

As the threat of a sunken ship was lifted, Tilly finally felt some relief. At least she no longer had to worry how they were going to travel on their own to Border Town.

But just at that moment, she suddenly felt something cold on her nose, raising her head, she could not help but freeze on the spot.

She could see snowflakes falling from the gray sky, flying around like white fairies, filling her entire field of view.

“This... is snow?” Tilly asked in disbelief as she looked at the melted water on top of her hand, “Graycastle has snow during autumn?”

“Well, it's like I said. The further West we go, the colder it

becomes,” One Eyed Jack said as he pulled out his pipe, “It seems you are really returning toward an abyss of suffering.”

Tilly was unable to answer, only showing a dignified look. Breeze had originally come from the Kingdom of Dawn, which had a favorable climate throughout the year, while Jack was born within the Fjords, where even during the strongest winter it was difficult for them to see heavy snowfall. But for Graycastle’s Western Region, snow had a special meaning.

Her court tutor had once said, that once the snow began to fall it wouldn’t stop for a long time. Just like the Devil’s fanfare it symbolized the beginning of the Months of Demons and would only settle after the Months of Demon had come to its end.

Although the beginning of the Months of Demons isn’t at a fixed date, generally it won’t start before the beginning of winter, can it be that Border Town is already under the attack of demonic beasts? Moreover, those Sea Ghost would usually only appear East of the Burning Fire Island, but right now there are even traces of them at the most southern corner of the Vortex Sea. I wonder if those merchant ships sailing between the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms are also under attack from these monsters.

Tilly was starting to feel more and more worried.

Navigating through the whirling snow for two more days, they finally saw the hazy coastline on top of the horizon.

Chapter 326 - Contact

“Is this the place where you landed last time?” Tilly asked, looking at the tall rocky cliff standing in front of them.

From the moment they had first seen the coastline, the Charming Beauty had followed it all the way westwards, until Ashes finally shouted for them to stop when they’ve reached the known beach.

“Yeah, take a look at them,” Ashes said as she pointed at the top of a cliff.

Tilly followed the direction of Ashes’ finger with her gaze and saw an orange flag on both sides of the peak flapping in the wind.

“Although it was a sandy beach when came here last, those two flags prove that we haven’t taken the wrong road.”

“I also had the same impression,” Old Jack said, the pipe as always still in his mouth, “But the last time they came, it was with a huge balloon which they had used to carry all the woman over the mountain. So, how are you planning to get over that?”

“Huge balloon?” Tilly asked curiously.

“That’s right, it can fly when it is filled with hot air,” Ashes nodded in confirmation, “It is said that it’s one of His Highness’ inventions. The principle behind it is to use the power from hot air to carry the balloon and the people inside up into the sky.”

The 5th Princess looked somewhat worried as she stated, “The court mentors have never taught us anything like that.” She then spat out a mouthful of white air before continuing, “No matter, I will see him soon, and when I do I will naturally come to know the truth. Let’s go ashore.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to wait aboard until he comes to pick you up?” The captain asked, clearing his pipe from ashes, “How are you planning to cross the cliff?”

“Shiva will handle it,” Tilly said smilingly.

Since it was a naturally formed coastline and no one really knew the depth of the seabed, the Charming Beauty couldn’t approach the shore. So the only way to send the people towards the sandbar was by using the landing boat.

When the group of witches stepped onto the thick snow, Tilly turned toward One Eyed Jack and said, “Mr. Captain, please wait here for three or four more days, Lotus and the others will also need your help returning to Sleeping Island.”

“Of course,” the captain agreed immediately, “Without you witches on board, I wouldn’t dare to sail back, ah. Who knows whether those Sea Ghosts will attack again on our way back home.”

When everything was said, Tilly went to the edge of the cliff and used the flying magic stone with her ability to head straight to the

top of the hilltop. Looking around, the terrain behind the mountain was much higher than the beach, it was almost at the same level as the hilltop. In other words, they would only have to go up and there would be no need for them to go down again to land. The height of the cliff was about fifty paces, and the magic consumption of the barrier would be increased when used against objects, but such a distance should still be no problem for Shiva. Having slowly come to land beside the four woman Tilly said, "Shiva, I will have to trouble you with those three."

"Yes, Lady Tilly," the latter said, showing a big smile while patting her chest. Then she summoned her invisible barrier. By now all of them were fully recovered after having rested for two days since last deflecting all the violent attacks from the sea monster. Waiting until all the people had stepped on top of her transparent barrier, she guided her magic, so that the barrier slowly rose up and soon they were above the hilltop.

Then, with Ashes' guidance the group spent half a day until finally arriving at Border Town.

The first thing that caught Tilly's eyes was a steel bridge with its unique shape. It spanned across a wide river with only two bridge piers at the bottom to act as support. Its iron beams neatly arranged, without any unnecessary beam or additional decoration or patterns. The snow laying on top of the deck was in stark contrast to the exposed parts of the black bridge, giving it an initial impression of an air of grandeur.

"This bridge... is really huge," Breeze sighed, "In the end, how many iron ingots did they need in order to create a bridge like

this?”

“It’s just a waste of materials. The traffic problem could have easily been solved with a pontoon bridge. What’s the point of building a bridge so high?” Ashes said, making it clear that she thought differently, “Border Town lays at the end of the route of merchant fleets, so which ship would want to travel to a river’s origin to do business?”

“That’s the opinion of people who only have a superficial knowledge and experience,” Andrea said while elegantly shaking her index finger. “Even though I’m not a citizen of Graycastle, I can still see that the forest at the western side possesses a considerable value for reclamation. Even though there is no town there right now, that doesn’t mean that there won’t be one in the future. If you want to continue to expand your territory, it is a good choice to expand into an uninhabited area. At that time the pontoon bridge would only become a hindrance for the trading route, Lady Tilly’s brother can be considered as someone thinking more long-term than you are.”

Ashes raised her eyebrows, “Previously you called him a vulgar nobleman who loved barbaric cooking, but now you’ve already changed how you address him to Lady Tilly’s brother?”

“The two words ‘vulgar nobleman’ were added by you,” the blond witch stated as she flung her hair away in a disdainful gesture, “In addition, thinking long-term and barbaric cooking doesn’t conflict, you shouldn’t try to stirring up enmity in front of Lady Tilly.”

Tilly, however, didn't care about this already common conflict between the two, her gaze instead was directed to the other side of the river.

There she had noticed an incredible phenomenon.

At this time the snow was still falling from the sky, the temperature no different than during the winter, so it was reasonable to say that it was a time the town's people should be hiding in their own homes, either around the fire, or rolled up beneath the quilt. Even in King's City, she had only ever seen a few people who had intensified their physical strength so as to elapse the bitter cold. If they wanted to keep their body warm, they would have to eat more than usual, not to mention the risk of catching a cold whenever they stepped out of the door. Therefore, apart from gathering the necessary food and drink, the overwhelming majority of civilians would always avoid any sort of action in the winter.

However, on the town's riverside there were people constantly coming and going, some pushing carts, some carrying big bags on their back, all walking hurriedly as if they were working. Yet, Tilly could not see a whip holding overseer anywhere among them, that was to say, these people were completely voluntary at their work.

How can this be?

After crossing the iron bridge, they were immediately stopped by two guards armed with peculiar spears, the guards were wearing uniform clothes and looked full of energy. Their demeanor completely different from the common patrols in the big cities.

“Stop, why have you come from the South?” One of them looked at them for a moment before asking, “Wait, are you... witches?”

This question left Tilly slightly stumped for words. Even though she was already aware that witches were living openly within the town, when personally hearing ordinary people asking such a question in such a calm manner, it still set off a bursts through her heart. “Yes, we are witches.”

“It seems you want to join the Witch Alliance,” the guard assumed laughingly. “Please wait here. I’ll report to the higher-ups immediately.”

“Wait? No, this is –”

“That’s right. Then we will stay here and wait.” Tilly stretched out her hand to interrupt Ashes, “Furthermore, can you tell me what those people there are busy with?”

“Oh them, they are repairing the dock. Due to the abrupt snow, there were a lot of things which have gotten messed up, but in the end I really don’t know much about what is going on over there.”

When the guard stepped back to his post, Ashes asked puzzled, “Why didn’t you inform him about your identity?”

“Aren’t you curious? Aren’t you wondering how he would receive a witch from another city?” Tilly told her with a wink.

It didn't take long until a tall woman dressed completely in white to come over. She had long blonde hair and her looks were impeccable. Even without having seen her magic, Tilly could feel a piercing vigor coming from her body, just like a sharp unsheathed blade.

There was no doubt, that the woman in front of them was a combat witch, and a very powerful one at that.

"I really thought that you were new witches who want to join the Witch Alliance. Haven't you already gone back to Sleeping Island?" She first said as she looked at Ashes, before sweeping her gaze over the rest of the crowd. When her eyes finally fell on Tilly she showed an expression of surprise for a moment before the sharp feeling suddenly disappeared, to be replaced by water-like warmth.

"Hello, my name Nightingale," she nodded in greeting. "I presume, you must be Tilly Wimbledon, His Highness Roland's younger sister."

Chapter 327 - The Reason

“Lady Tilly!”

Guided by Nightingale to the lord’s castle, the 5th princess never expected that the first person to greet her would be Sylvie. She ran over cheerfully, skipping the salute and instead bent over to give her a hug, “How come you’re here, it’s still autumn.”

“It’s no different from winter now,” Tilly laughed, “Where are the others?”

“Lotus is currently building houses for the refugees, Evelyn and Candle are still in the industrial area, and Honey is in the back-garden busy training messengers.” Sylvie counted on her fingers, “His Highness has already sent people to go inform them.”

“Don’t worry, I think you’ll be able to see them soon.” A familiar, yet strange voice came from behind Sylvie.

Tilly raised her head and saw a gray-haired man with a big smile on his face, his appearance was not much different from her memories, his smile and his demeanor however were completely unlike in the past.

“Welcome to Border Town, my dear sister.”

...

Tilly's thoughts were in turmoil, there were too many suspicions she wanted to blurt out, but she kept a straight face as she followed Roland Wimbledon into a room that looked like a study.

"Please sit," the other side said as he poured a glass of warm black tea and placed it in front of her. "A whole year has gone by since the last time we've seen each other. I know you've had a lot of things you want to talk to me about, it's the same with me... but there's no need to hurry." He looked at the falling snow outside the window and continued to say, "The winter is still very long."

She grabbed the cup, and wordlessly sat down by the mahogany table, quietly sizing up the fourth prince.

Even with only the opening remarks Tilly felt that it wasn't something she could ever imagine her timid and cowardly brother to say. He had always appeared strong on the outside but was actually weak on the inside. He was always looking for the fastest way of escape, never wanting to face an issue directly. The Roland Wimbledon before her was completely different. He was trying to take the initiative of the conversation, and despite his soft and gentle tone, he completely showed the demeanor of a person fully comfortable in his place as a leader.

"Nightingale," Roland tilted his head.

"But Your Highness..." the guiding witch's voice came from somewhere within the room.

"It doesn't matter, she is my little sister."

“Very well,” Nightingale was silent for a moment, then her body appeared, before she unhappily left the room.

“Now the only people here is you and me,” he laughed a little as he returned to the table.

Tilly was silent for a while, “In the end, who... are you really?”

She thought that the other party would hesitate or pretend to be mysterious, never would she expect that he would answer her so quickly, “I am your older brother, Roland Wimbledon, Graycastle’s 4th Prince.” Then he laughed, “I know I changed a lot, but I’m willing to explain it to you slowly.”

Tilly suddenly remembered what he had written in the latter. ‘As for what let me make this decision, and what made me no longer indifferent to this as I was in the past, these small trifling things can be slowly discussed at a later opportunity.’ It probably had been this sentence that prompted her to decide to come to this remote town.

She couldn’t help but open her mouth, “I’d be happy to hear what you have to say.”

The whole story wasn’t complicated, but was very exciting. After Roland told her of his experiences after being given Border Town, Tilly discovered that her cup had long since been emptied. She let out a long breath, then reviewed his story once again. Simply put, a witch named Anna moved Roland, and through the saved witch,

he became aware of the evil acts of the Church and the sinister lies they told the people. Then, with Garcia's assassination attempt it brought him to realize the dark side of the royal power, even when he hid in the corner of the kingdom he still would not be able to evade their viciousness, so finally he decided to change it all.

Even though this sounded somewhat dramatic, but with some difficulty, it could count as an acceptable explanation. However, there still remained the question about the strange knowledge, whether it's the steam engine or the guns, it's impossible that it came from a moment's perception and awareness.

"So, you are saying, that the ultimate cause of all this is the memories which suddenly appeared in your head?" Tilly asked.

"Indeed," Roland said honestly, "I know this is hard to believe, but it's a fact... After I luckily evaded 3rd sister's assassination attempt, that was when I woke up from the coma and came to realized these things. If we say that meeting Anna was the impetus, then the content of the memories was the driving force behind my wish to change the status quo."

Was it a witch? Tilly thought, the possibility of either replacement or control are both slim, Sylvie has already confirmed that the Witch Alliance's abilities weren't unknown, every day they would undergo a special practice, none of them have powers relating to those two areas, not even remotely.

The only possibility left was possession, she didn't eliminate the possibility that they had this kind of ability, which allowed them through invade and occupy the body and obtain the other person's

thoughts. But this speculation is equally uncertain, no matter how father thought about Roland, he is undoubtedly one of Graycastle's princes. Therefore, always wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation was normal for him, and there were always knights and personal guards around to protect him, which made it impossible for a witch who has no hiding ability to get close to him.

But, even with such a witch, how can she possibly know so many things that are out of the ordinary? When she was a child, Tilly besides liking to rummage through the Palace Library, she also received teaching from several white-haired, erudite and multi-talented court mentors, but even they had never talked about using the power of steam and snow powder to replace animal power and swords.

So it seemed that his quirky knowledge had something to do with his bizarre encounters.

"How will you prove that you are indeed Roland Wimbledon and not just the part which appeared with those extra memories?"

Tilly knew that this question was quite rude, if he were to act like the former 4th Prince she knew, he would undoubtedly have exploded into a rage by now, flipped over the table and stamped out of the room.

"Because I still remember the matters which happened on the court," the other party's tone remained calm. "I think it is a person's unique memory that distinguishes the essence of a person. If a well-known witch was to become exactly the same as you, with only her memories not the same, she would still

essentially be another person. Even though I have a lot of strange memories, I do not remember where these came from. However, your weeping expression as you left me when I threw you onto the broken glass is still vividly embedded in my memory, so there is the proof.” He paused, “Of course... I haven’t had the time to apologize to you, but I still hope that it will not be too late.”

Tilly fell silent, the Roland before her eyes wore a clean attire and an expression of sincerity. As if to tell her that it was needless to doubt since it was all true. Obviously, no matter from where she looked at him, the new him was much better than the dandy Prince from before, but there were some doubts remaining within her heart.

“Truly... hard to believe.”

“That’s normal,” Roland said as if he had seen through her thoughts. “There are a lot of things which are unthinkable before you personally experience them. For me, I would never have expected my younger sister would have awaken as a witch, even concealing it from all the people within the palace. However... As I’ve said at the beginning, this winter is still very long, we will have a lot of time to slowly come to understand each other.”

It’s probably the best solution, at the moment, Tilly nodded, “Then for the next few months... I’m sorry to be troubling you.”

“Let me handle it, you’ll love it here.”

Chapter 328 - Formal talk

After Tilly had left his office, Roland finally breathed out in relieve.

Obviously, when in front of a smart person, having to hold serious conversation while also talking complete nonsense created a lot of pressure. Especially, if you want to maintain a sincere and genuine expression. Fortunately, Nightingale's report allowed him to take a breather – Roland took the fact that the witches from Sleeping Island have all returned to the castle as an opportunity to end the conversation.

“How come you don't have any special feelings when facing your younger sister who's become a witch?” Nightingale said as she turned around to sit on the table, occupying a high ground to overlook the prince.

He rolled his eyes and ill-humoredly said, “Can't feeling strong pressure also be regarded as a special feeling?”

“I thought it was a touching reunion,” Nightingale said, curling her lips.

“Previously I didn't have a good relationship with her,” Roland sighed. “During the time we lived in the palace, I used to bully her. Later when we grew up we both became estranged from one another, so it was an unexpected pleasure for her to come here.”

“Oh?” Nightingale said meaningfully, “It is unlike you to

confront an unfamiliar witch alone, as I see it you are quite trusting of her.”

That’s because I didn’t want you to see me lying, Roland decided it would be better not to answer, instead he refilled his cup and leaned back in his chair slowly sipping a mouthful.

“In short... you will come to understand it later.”

Nightingale reached out, touching his lips, “You will tell me everything, won’t you?”

“...Yes.”

“I’ll take that as a promise then,” she laughed and disappeared.

Roland leaned back against his chair, recalling his whole conversation with Tilly, searching for any possible flaw – he had given her the “most appropriate” explanation that he could think of. Many years of work experience had told him, the more exaggerated a lie, the lower the possibility that it would survive speculation. Therefore, deliberately hiding one’s clumsiness during childhood to save face, accidentally finding ancient books, or meeting a hermit who taught him were the kinds of lies that would be easily exposed as long as the other side kept on asking. Furthermore, in addition to being his sister, the other side was also from a witch organization, thus every lie exposed before we form a stable relationship could bring on a heavy blow to our mutual trust.

So he chose to tell the truth about the parts that could be uncovered and explained the additional from a sudden appearance of new memories – even though it sounded incredible, but in contrast to an even more incredible thought of crossing over it at least did not have too many negative consequences and also couldn't be claimed to be false. If the latter event was to take place, it wouldn't be certain whether or not she could come to accept a complete stranger from another world.

As long as he insisted on his identity as Graycastle's 4th Prince there would be no way to deny it. Furthermore, Roland believed that all she had wanted was to hear an explanation personally from his mouth. Within his heart, he knew, that a good leader shouldn't entangle themselves with the past, instead the most important thing would be to move towards the future. The winter would allow him to show her the vast prospects that the Western Region held so as to ensure their cooperation, only then would this be seen as a successful first meeting. As for the relationship between her and him, there would be a lot of time to repair it in the future.

That evening, they hold a grand banquet in the castle hall.

Not to mention the commonly seen pepper steak, fried egg, and white bread there were also all kinds of liquor on display, sweet smelling fried bird kiss mushrooms, steamed dumplings as well as ice cream. With the desire to bring the taste of the dishes to a new level, he simultaneously introduced the concept of fancily arranged sampler platter. Placing small pieces from the main dishes on top of a big china plate and sprinkle it with soy paste, creating an excellent visual effect that entices everyone who sees it to reach out for it.

Crisscrossing their wine cups under the sparkling candle light, the dinner finally ended with a warm and lively atmosphere.

That was when the more formal talk started.

Within the living room in front of a burning fireplace, Roland and the members of the Witch Alliance sat in a long row of seats, while Tilly and the other witches of Sleeping Island sat in the opposite row. Maggie however, because of her sensitive role, had simply turned into her pigeon form and squat down on the chandelier above their heads.

Tilly took the lead and started the discussion: “I, in addition to wanting to help Border Town resist the invasion of demonic beasts, also intend to send back the first batch of five witches.” She summarized Sleeping Island’s current situation, “Next spring, Silver Moon Bay are going to send us a group of ordinary immigrants to the island, so we will have to rely on Lotus and Honey to prepare extra food and housing for them in advance.”

Roland got a headache, if he wanted to resist the invasion of the demonic beasts the First Army would be enough. With the exception of nimble and extremely fast types of mixed species, there was hardly any situation which demanded that they send out witches.

But in the construction area, the role of the witch was irreplaceable. At the moment, the path through the mountains toward the new sea hasn’t yet been opened, the dock was only halfway constructed and he would still like to build additional cave dwellings for the newest batch of immigrants. Thus, he decided to

ask, “Can you delay their journey for half a month?”

“I wish I could agree, but circumstances have changed,” Tilly reluctantly shook her head, “We have already met with Sea Ghosts in the southern part of the Vortex Sea, which are fish type demonic beast. I suspect that this has to do with the advanced beginning of the Months of Demons. According to legends, the longer the Months of Demons is, the more aggressive and fearsome the demonic beasts will be. Therefore, they will have to travel as soon as possible, if we want to guarantee a relatively safe trip.

“They are not fit to fight.”

“I know, that’s also the reason why Breeze will escort the ship – her ability is very effective against mentally inferior enemies, we also don’t intend to return in the same way we came. Instead, we’ll be sailing northward along the coastline until we can reach Port of Clear Water. From there we will take the usual trade route to Sleeping Island. According to recently arrived messenger birds, there haven’t been any demonic beasts detected on the routes between the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms.

Roland still had to make at least one final effort, “Uh ... So, besides Lotus and Honey, would it be possible for the other three to stay? Currently, they are only halfway through their Primary Education, so leaving now would be the equivalent to them giving up halfway...”

“Puff Haha,” Tilly couldn’t suppress her laughter, “It seems you are quite interested in them.”

“...” he did not know how to respond to this statement.

“I would like to know how you are planning to use Candle’s and Evelyn’s ability?”

“Curing metal parts and brewing, the former can greatly improve the efficiency of mechanical operation, the latter well...” Roland slightly paused, “Wine is a very good thing, there are many other uses to it besides drinking.”

“Well, on Sleeping Island they’ve always been worried that there wouldn’t be an actual use for their ability, furthermore, they were also often...” Tilly didn’t elaborate further, but Roland could already speculate that she was actually talking about discrimination. The same experience Mystery Moon had to face during her time with the Witch Cooperation Association. “I am very happy to hear that you want them so urgently to stay. Sure enough, every witch has their own unique and unmatched role, and it doesn’t make the least sense that their ability would be meaningless.” She looked at Evelyn and the others and asked, “What do you think?”

“I want to follow you, Lady Tilly,” Sylvie stated.

I...” Candle touched her head, “Am willing to go anywhere.”

“Lady Tilly, if you need me, I will go back to Sleeping Island,” Evelyn fell silent for a moment before she continued to say, “Otherwise, I would like to stay in Border Town. I... there are still

so many things that I hope to learn from Teacher Scroll.”

“Don’t be so nervous, I’m not forcing you to choose if you want to stay or go – it isn’t a two choice question,” Tilly smiled and shook her head. “I just want to know what you think about living in Border Town. You can return to Sleeping Island at any time. The same is true for Lotus and Honey, it is unlikely that they will leave forever. I even hope to invite the witches from Border Town to come to Sleeping Island. We hope that through our efforts, whether it be the North or the South, in the future all witches should be free to live where they want. Don’t you think so too, Elder Brother?”

Roland was slightly shocked, this was the first time he had heard her addressing him like this. Even within the memories of the 4th Prince, it was also more than a decade ago. He smiled and nodded, “There will definitely be a day like this.”

Chapter 329 - Clarion

After coming to an agreement, Roland cleared his throat and continued in a serious tone, “Next there is some news regarding the Devils and the ruins.”

He informed Tilly about Border Town’s recent discoveries within the Concealing Forest and behind the snow-capped mountain, “I’d intended to send witches and soldiers of the First Army to bring the trapped person back to Border Town, but the heavy snow arriving more than a month ahead of time has messed up my plan.”

“That the Devil’s legendary army was in such close proximity, and that there are still some people left within the ruins from more than four hundred years ago...” Tilly became dumbstruck in amazement, “I’m slowly starting to believe what you’ve told me...”

Anna looked at Roland and he coughed twice, “According to the scene we observed and the reaction shown, it seems that the Devils must have been behind the snow-capped mountain for many years already. I suspect that they are limited to the area covered by the red fog, and thus unable to continue their expansion toward the Four Kingdoms. So, for now I don’t think that they will be a threat to Border Town. Within the next two years, I will set up a coastal warning point to monitor their movements.” He paused, “As for the woman sealed in the remains of the tower, she might know the truth behind the Holy City Taqila and the utter defeat of the Church.”

“I have the same thoughts,” Tilly closed her eyes and pondered

about it, “Is there any way to avoid taking a land route, could we perhaps reach it directly from the air? Ashes told me that you have a tool that can be driven by hot air.”

“You want to bring her out of ruins now, in the middle of the Months of Demons?” Roland asked, full of disbelief, “The number of people which can board the hot air balloon is ten, or if we exchange it for a bigger one, we could perhaps expand the number of people to fifteen. However, no matter how many we are, if we encounter the Devils we are likely to suffer casualties. Furthermore, there is also the risk which comes from encountering roaming demonic beasts... it’s too dangerous.

“If you only depend on the Witch Alliance, it will indeed be very dangerous,” Tilly agreed, “But Shavi and Ashes are here now. With them the degree of danger will be reduced by a lot. According to your previous statement, the Devil’s current attack patterns is throwing spears from a far off distance and using the same amount of strength as an extraordinary. If it is like this, then Shavi’s invisible barrier can block several spears, while Ashes could suppress the enemy during close combat. Right now the Months of Demons is still in its early stages, so the power of the demonic beasts is still not that strong, if you want to go to the ruins, now would be the best opportunity.”

Roland felt a little hesitant, the last fight with the Devils was also an air battle which had been to their disadvantage so if he wanted to fly over there he felt quite unstable within his heart. But the words Tilly had said also made sense. Sylvie’s magic eye could ensure that they would discover the enemy first. Furthermore, as long as they maintained an altitude of 10 to 15 meters, flying only a bit above the tree-top, he had confidence that they could reach the

ground before the enemy spotted them. Then with Nightingale's and Ashes' powerful offensive abilities, defeating a group of around ten Devils would easily be accomplished. Even if there were some who managed to slip through the net, the double protection of from Shavi's and Anna's shields should be able to assure the team's safety.

After irresolutely muttering to himself for a short period he asked, "Are you really sure you want to go?"

"I feel that this might be an opportunity to unravel the mystery," Tilly said frankly, "This year's advanced start for the Months of Demons and the Sea Ghost emerging from the Southern Sea Vortex is always giving me a bad feeling."

Roland's heart skipped a beat, this feeling he also knew quite well. The early start of the Months of Demons was unlikely to be abnormal phenomena caused by climate change, he faintly felt that it had something to do with the Devils and the Church.

"In that case, who will fill the ranks?"

"I do not know which witches Border Town will send, but I will be going," Tilly declared without hesitation.

...

As far as the eye could see snowflakes were dancing in the air under the gray sky, after repelling the last attack Mayne and

Tayfun unhurriedly boarded Hermes' city wall.

Some of the snowflakes landed in the black and warm blood river flowing at the foot of the wall, diluting the thick blood as it melted. Fortunately, all this blood belonged to the enemy, while hundreds of soldiers from the God's Punishment Army stood straight along the wall and were waiting for the launch of the next wave of demonic beasts.

"Your Excellencies, Sir!" the shoulders of the Army of Judges who assisted the God's Punishment Army shouted while placing their fists on their chest. Most of their faces appeared to be somewhat young and tender, but their eyes also held two distinct emotions, fear and excitement.

"It seems that some of them are still children," Tayfun commented after reaching an open space and overlooking the wilderness, then he sighed and continued, "When I was their age, I was still milling flour for some nobles."

"The priority of the God's Punishment Army is to protect the New Holy City while parts of the Army of Judges that are more experienced are still caught up in Wolfsheart City cleaning up the last remaining evil elements. Those people are only recently promoted believers, they have never been on a real battlefield before," Mayne explained, "The snow has come too early."

Tayfun hesitated before he asked, "There isn't such a situation mentioned within the Holy Book?"

“The Holy Book is also only written by the Pope, so it’s unavoidable that there would be some parts that are overlooked that will appear,” the bishop said as he leaned against the ice-cold wall while overlooking the pile of corpses at the foot of the steep cliff. Ordinary demonic beasts would never be able to climb up such a steep wall, the only ones that could threaten the Holy City were the mixed species, “It’s fine as long as it can point out the general direction we need to follow. From the demonic beasts which have appeared, it can be inferred that there are still approximately ten years remaining.”

“Using two years to unify the Four Kingdoms and spending the remaining eight years to build up the God’s Punishment Army, by then the Church should have a large contingent of more than ten thousand people.” After stopping for a moment he went on to say, “Using the firm walls and Hermes’ terrain, we will stick to this plateau until the enemy’s strength reverses.”

“I’m old, I’m afraid I won’t be able to see that day come.”

“It’s unrelated to age, Your Excellency Tayfun,” Mayne said in a comforting tone, “There are many people who are unable to see that moment, like Allan, Stone, Liji...”

“And Heather,” Tayfun added.

“Yes, and Heather.” He nodded, “but in any case, there will always be people who will carry on our mission and continue to move forward.”

“Do not say such discouraging words,” the old man shook his head, but then smiled as he asked, “Wait, was Zero able to get a hold on the fierce snow powder formula? Did the Pivotal Secret Area already start their test?”

“Mortal’s toys aren’t of any help to the Church,” Mayne said full of disdain, “It may be possible to use snow powder to clean up a group of demonic beasts, but our real enemies are the Devils from hell. Used in an open area its lethality will be greatly reduced, if you want to create a force strong enough to break the Devil’s heavy armor, you are going to need a very large amount of it. In addition, besides the soldiers from the God’s Punishment Army there is no one who could go out and throw half a body-sized bag of snow powder over a great distance.

“It’s like that? What a pity.”

“If you want to beat the Devils, there is no time to play tricks,” Mayne said stressing each word, “Only by confronting them head-on will we be able to survive.”

At this moment, from the watchtower to the side of them came the sound of a long horn blow.

One long horn blow stood for an invading wave of demonic beasts.

“Let’s go back to the cathedral since there is going to be another fight soon.”

“Okay,” Tayfun nodded and turned around to go as the horn sounded again.

Woo-woo

Two long sounds meant that the wave of demonic beasts contained a lot of mixed species. Hearing this Mayne’s heart quickened, it was undoubted that the God’s Punishment Army would have to face a fierce battle.

But... why is it so fast? This is only the first month of the Months of Demons, ah.

However, just as the horn sound ended the third one already rang up. An oppressive and unbroken sound like the sudden clap of thunder, rolling over Hermes for a long time without subsiding.

Woowoo – woo –

Mayne almost couldn’t believe his ear, looking at Tayfun, he saw that the other’s face looked as shocked as he felt himself. Three horn blows stood for a very urgent situation, a situation at which Hermes’ survival stood at stake! Even last time, when the demonic beasts were able to reach the outskirts of the cathedral, it wasn’t a situation where the blows have reached that number.

What did the watchman see?

It wasn’t long until Mayne got his answer.

Within the black tide of demonic beasts were two strangely formed enormous beasts. They possessed four thick fangs, four feet, and two hands. Their bodies were covered in pitch-black fur and one foot alone already possessed the size of a mixed wolf species. From afar, those two beasts looked like moving fortresses. With every step they took they left a deep mark in permafrost covered plains. If those demonic beasts which surrounded them were not avoided on time they would be smashed into the ground by their feet and turned into a pool of flesh and blood.

There were several records of them within the Holy Book, The Death's Herald, the Hell's Nightmare, the Devil's fangs... But what Mayne feared the most wasn't their terrible appearance, but what they represented.

Why? His mind was completely occupied by horror. Why are those terror striking monsters, which according to the Holy Book should only appear five years before the disaster already appearing at Hermes right now?

Chapter 330 - Farewell

The next day, Roland bid Lotus and Honey farewell in the castle backyard.

Even though the two women didn't want to leave so soon, but when he heard that the Charming Beauty and its crew were still waiting at the beach he decided not to delay their departure any further. In this way he could show off his magnanimity, and keep from causing Tilly any further embarrassment. Putting himself into her shoes he had to recognize that even though she needed to finish their large scale construction on Sleeping Island first, the fact that they will continue to send the all important witches to Border Town still counted as a sincere gesture on their part. Since their situation was already like this he also couldn't be too demanding.

In order to to avoid a long journey through the snow, Anna and Wendy would be there to send them off using Cloud Gazer, in so doing they could easily reduce the travel time to reach the beach to thirty minutes.

“Thank you for taking care of us these past few months,” the two witches said while bowing in front of Roland.

“It should be me thanking you,” Roland said laughingly. “You two have made many contributions towards the construction of Border Town, so I have gifts I would like to give to you.”

“G-gift?” Lotus said with her cheeks having turned slightly red

from embarrassment.

While Honey touched her chest and looked over at Lotus' and then excitedly asking: "Will we also get them?"

Roland took two bags from Nightingale and handed it over to them, "Yes you can have them."

Unable to wait any longer, Honey opened the gift and pulled out a long white cloth, "Hey, what is this? It isn't a corset."

"Keke, it's a scarf," he stepped forward, took the fabric made of cotton from her before wrapping it around her neck, "This way, you won't need to be afraid of the wind and snow pouring onto your neck. Wrap it around a bit higher and you can even cover your ears with it."

"Hmm... nice and warm," the latter cried out with a contented face.

It was unsure whether this was an illusion, but it seemed that Lotus' face had become even redder.

"There's more," Honey said after having played with the scarf for a moment, she then took out a small box from the bag and asked, "Your Highness, is this also a gift?"

"Yes, open it and take a look."

“Wow, it is so clear!” She jubilantly exclaimed after lifting up the top of the box, “Lotus, come and take a look, you can clearly see for yourself!”

It was a small mirror embedded in a wooden box, a gift which was also available at the convenience market. In Roland’s life experience, as long as they were women, there was no way they would be able to resist such a sparkling present.

Honey’s voice, which was filled with excitement, immediately attracted the other witches, and so the Sleeping Island’s witches clustered in a group. They used the mirror to look at their own appearance and couldn’t help but show an undisguised love and envy towards it. After all, the image reflected by the mirror made using Soraya’s reflective coating was far better than a silver mirror, which also allowed Roland to discover a new way he could bribe them.

After the gifts were all handed out and the hot air balloon fully inflated. The group boarded the basket and waved their goodbyes to Roland and the other witches. On seeing this scene, it seemed that now that they were about to leave town they have started to feel a slight bit reluctant to parting ways.

“I can’t help but admit that this is indeed a good place,” Tilly came over to him and whispered, “With a convenient water supply and comfortable rooms. It’s very difficult to believe that in just one year you were able to transform such a desolate place into its current appearance.”

“Do you regret it?”

“You mean that I’ve sent the witches to your town?” She laughed, “How could that be? As long as they can live a better life, how could I ever regret it? Do not forget, I too am a witch.”

In the white garden, Tilly’s smile was pure and beautiful, not a trace of color to be seen. If he had a younger sister like this in his previous life, he would have caused a 100% rate for turning heads if he were to bring her out. But Roland knew, compared to her identity as his sister, his actual relationship with her was more like a partner, a natural ally. From yesterday’s decision he could already see that she wouldn’t hesitate to take on personal risks to deal with any possible threats .

“Do you really intend to go to such a dangerous place?” Roland asked her, “Although you are an exceptional witch, in the end, your ability isn’t suited towards fighting.”

“Do not worry, it isn’t as if I don’t have any self-protection ability,” Tilly said as she stretched out her hands, showing him the ornaments she wore. On the ring finger of her left hand, she carried a blue crystal ring, while on her right hand she wore a white silk glove with a red gem embedded in the back. To be honest Roland had to acknowledge that this collection looked a bit strange clothing looked similar to the asymmetrical mix and match style of dress used by artist of the later generations. He had been very curious about this since yesterday, but out of courtesy had kept from asking.

“It is a magic stone. This one, in particular, is the magic stone we

found within the ancient ruins,” she explained, “After putting your magic into it, it can display all kinds of abilities. For example, this ring allows me to fly like Lightning.”

After she spoke, as if to prove her words, her feet lifted from the ground. As if her whole body had turned weightless, she stayed suspended in midair which had given Roland quite a shock.

A witch’s ability can actually change through a magic stone?

He soon realized the significance this held.

If it was possible to order custom-made abilities in batches, a witch’s work efficiency would increase drastically. For example, Lotus’, if the Witch Union could have several magic stones with a copy of her ability the construction of the temporary residential area could be completed within a single day.

When Tilly landed back on the ground, she pointed at an open space with her right hand, and soon after Roland saw a bright light flaring from her fingertips. After hitting the snow it left an ankle deep bowl shaped hole which revealing the dark earth of the ground.

“Does this mean you can use both abilities at the same time?” Roland asked in surprise.

“No,” Tilly shook her head, “Within a certain range, the magic stone allows you to use one ability. If I push magic simultaneously

into two stones nothing would happen,” she smiled, “Originally, I didn’t intend to reveal this information to you this early on, but after our conversation from last night, I’ve come to think that I might have misunderstood you... The fact that you’ve honestly told me about what had happened in the ancient ruins, made me happy... but also a little apologetic.”

“No harm, I can understand where you’re come from.”

“Oh that’s right, there is still something I want to ask you, what is this corset Honey just mentioned?”

Roland almost choked on his own saliva, “Keke, I have no idea... maybe you should go and ask Sylvie or Evelyn about it.”

“Well,” Tilly shrugged, “It seems you still have some reservation towards me.”

For some time, the Prince didn’t know what to say.

With a wink, she said, “Let’s not talk about this for now. Since last night I’ve had a problem I’ve been thinking something, if these sites really did belong to the Church why would they leave these magic stones behind? According to what happened to Ashes, it is most likely that the Church is raising their own group of witches. Thus, these items should also have the a similar importance to them. Even if they wanted to deliberately bury knowledge of the war after being forced to flee from the Devils, it wouldn’t hinder them from continuing to use these stones, it just doesn’t make sense.”

“Does that mean the Church doesn’t care about this loss at all?” Roland thought aloud, only to quickly reject his conjecture, “No, they should not be able to mass produce these magic stones, or it would have been completely impossible for the Witch Cooperation Association to flee. After all, if they had been able to fly, it would have been completely impossible to escape the Church’s witch hunt.”

“Indeed, I recall that I’ve found a very strange point when I looked through all the books in the palace library about the Church and their God... Not only does their historical records stop at around four hundred years ago, even their god’s origin is somewhat vague. He has no name, no epic legend, except for propagating his omnipotence there is nothing more, no more details. Compared with the Three Ancient Gods, he appears to be a vague notion with nothing to it. With those two points together, I can’t help it but feel that something is strange about all of this.”

“What?” Roland’s heart trembled with fear.

“It feels as if the Church just suddenly has appeared from out of nowhere.”

Chapter 331 - The Key To “Art”

‘It feels as if the Church just suddenly has appeared from out of nowhere.’

This sentence continued echoing through Roland’s mind as he was returning to his office.

He closed his eyes and carefully looked through the memories of the 4th Prince, but he still couldn’t find any relevant information about this. His understanding of the Church was the same as that of any other ordinary nobleman. During his time at the palace the 4th Prince never bothered spending that much effort in learning anything useful, so his knowledge concerning the occult was practically a full-on blank space. But, if what Tilly had said was true, then the Church’s propaganda strategy was also rather strange.

Taking his former world of religious myths, for example, since the beginning of the world there have always been gods and the routine everyone agreed on was that the gods were the ones who created the world. Stories such as the creation in seven days, karma, reincarnation, and so on... those were legends used to describe the power of the Gods and were a standard part of every religion.

Compared to them, the Church of this world was quite... lacking.

But Roland didn’t have any more clues to consider, so he shook his head and decided to put such thoughts behind him.

Maybe their questions would be answered when they went to explore the ruins within the Concealing Forest.

He went to the window and looked towards the garden where a huge coating was laid out on the ground – in the middle of the vast expanse of white snow its bluish green appearance seemed particularly eye-catching.

Nowadays Soraya was creating a bigger air sac, the new hot air balloon's volume would become much larger and would thus be able to transport a larger crowd of people. This was preparation in case they were unable to free the trapped woman when going to the ruins in the case that Anna wasn't able to cut-down the whole "ice-coffin" and bring the woman and some of the transparent stones back to Border Town.

They would depart in in two days.

The people that would be going along had already been decided. Tilly, Sylvie, Shavi, Ashes and Andrea would be from the Sleeping Island witches while the Witch Alliance would send Anna, Wendy, Nightingale, Nana, Lightning, and Maggie. This line-up could be said to be unprecedentedly powerful. Its attack, defense, and battlefield awareness were of the highest level, so as long as there was no God's Stone of Retaliation being used, the Devils wouldn't even have a chance of approaching them.

"Your Royal Highness, Chief Alchemist Sir Kyle Sichi wishes to see you," one of his personal guards said from the door.

“Let him in.”

Kyle wasn't alone, this time he had come together with his colleague Chavez, “Your Royal Highness, the outline for your requested large-scale production of nitric acid has been completed.”

“Really?” Roland stared blankly but soon after a burst of happiness flooded his heart. This was probably the best piece of news he had heard within these past few days. He stood up in excitement and personally poured a cup of tea for the two chemists as he asked, “Tell me, how did you manage it?”

“The credit for this belong to Chavez,” he said laughingly, “so I will let him explain it.”

“Your honorable Highness,” the young Chavez bowed, seeming somewhat reserved as soon as he opened his mouth. “Your alchemical... no, the chemical reaction used in the laboratory to produce nitric acid is produced by distilling saltpeter to obtain diluted nitric acid and then it's purified with concentrated sulfuric acid. I tried to put the two together by placing the saltpeter directly into the concentrated sulfuric acid for shared heating. By doing so I successfully obtained nitric acid, even more, its purity was very high, so much so that it was possible to observe the phenomenon of fuming which was spoken of within “Elementary Chemistry”.

“Shared heating? But combining those two isn't the same,”

Roland said baffled, “The temperature used for dry distillation is much higher than the temperature that is used for shared heating, the gas produced by the dry distillation should be nitrogen oxide. Only by bubbling it through water it would become diluted nitric acid. Concentrated sulfuric acid is only used for purification because of its high boiling point and its strong water absorption which in turn reduces the moisture content in the nitric acid, this doesn’t involve any sort of chemical reactions.”

“I myself also don’t quite understand why it happened, but Mr. Sichi, thinking that my discovery was merely a coincidence, then went and did a couple of experiments.”

“Coincidence?” Roland stared at the Chief Alchemist.

“Indeed,” Kyle said with certainty, “The two are not the same, but they still produced the same effect. Following the chemical formula, I guess that there is a component within the saltpeter that reacts with the sulfuric acid but evaporates in the heat, leaving only nitric acid behind. According to the formula, it looks like some kind of... well, nitrate.”

It suddenly occurred to Roland that the chemistry textbook did mention that before synthetic ammonia was invented, people had used nitric acid or potassium nitrate to react with concentrated sulfuric acid to produce nitric acid, this was also the oldest manufacture method known. Because the main ingredient of saltpeter were two different kinds of nitrate, it was, easy to obtain. Furthermore, the extraction was also relatively easy. So as long as the temperature could be controlled, they would have a steady stream of evaporated nitric acid to collect.

Of course, because this method consumed a large amount of sulfuric acid, and at the same time easily led to the corrosion of the equipment, it was later replaced by more advanced technology.

But to Roland, these two points weren't much of a problem. After all, the fertilizer and pesticide industry hasn't been established yet, so the produced sulfuric acid could only be used for the purification of nitric acid. While Soraya's coatings could easily solve the problem brought from the strongly corrosive nitric acid steam.

"Well done," Roland said while happily patting Chavez's shoulder, "You were unexpectedly able to come up with such a method by chance."

"You're unaware of it, but his outstanding luck has already revealed itself within Redwater City's Alchemic Workshop," Kyle Sichi said as he raised an eyebrow. "Before learning chemistry, the exploration of alchemy was something which relied on luck. Within his early twenties, this kid had already discovered the double acid preparation method and had become the youngest alchemist within the workshop, that was enough to turn the eyes of the other thirty to forty years old apprentices red with envy. You can imagine how most of them will be stuck as apprentices for the rest of their lives."

"Anyway, this is good news for the town," Roland praised. "First, you should try to make a batch of equipment to examine it further, I will let a witch cooperate with you. If feasible, we will then expand the scale of production."

“As you will.”

“Alright, I still have another task to give you,” Roland said, putting away his joyful expression and continuing in a solemn tone, “Now that we will have a reliable source of nitric acid, I will need you to produce something that is very dangerous – nitroglycerin.”

“How dangerous is it?” Kyle asked.

“It is actually very simple to use the raw materials, namely, letting concentrated nitric acid react with glycerol, supplemented with concentrated sulfuric acid to act as a catalysator. However, during the reaction process you must strictly control the temperature and the ventilation. Since the nitrification produces a lot of heat, it would also be best to put the container into iced water for the experiment. Bear in mind that alteration between hot and cold, vibrations, impacts, or friction might lead to it exploding.” Roland didn’t know how reliable his amateur knowledge would be in the end, but the ingredients were undoubtedly correct, so even if there was likely to be some danger, it was still something he had to try. “During the experiment, it will be alright to merely use a small amount of ingredients, so that in case a mishap occurs Lady Nana should still be able to heal you.”

“This...” Chavez opened his mouth to answer, but even before he could say another word, Kyle had already given his promise, “I understand, and its power is something comparable to snow powder?”

“It’s entirely different.”

“It looks like an interesting experiment.” The Chief Alchemist said and laughed.

So it’s true that nine out of ten chemists are explosion maniacs... Roland thought.

Nitroglycerin is extremely unstable, Nobel especially added diatomaceous earth to it to make it blunter and this increased its safety. However, while this did, in fact, improve its safety, it also reduced its explosive power. Naturally, Roland wouldn’t be using that classical method. Instead, he intended to add nitrocellulose or nitrostarch into the nitroglycerin, both of which could stabilize it while further enhance the explosive effect. The former would make an excellent smoke-free explosive, while the latter would produce a stronger explosion. From their names alone it could already be seen that a lot of nitric acids would be key in the evolution of black powder into gunpowder.

And now he was in the possession of that very key.

Chapter 332 - What One Has Seen And Heard

In the days before they would set out to explore the ruins Tilly's greatest interest was slowly strolling along the flat streets of Border Town, observing the remote territory which had already undergone such startling changes in the hands of Lord Roland.

This small town stands out from the masses, she thought, the more carefully she observed everything, the more she became aware of this. It was entirely different from any other place she had been to before... and what left her the most impressed was probably the gorgeous and unparalleled vitality which this small town radiated.

Even the up-and-coming Sleeping Island couldn't compare with it.

"Aren't these people afraid of the cold?" Andrea said, full of amazement at seeing the pedestrian coming and going on the street. "What did your brother do that they'd be willing to work during the winter?"

"It's still autumn," Ashes retorted, "You can't even tell different season apart."

"But there is no difference between the current weather and winter. This is analogous with the argument which frequently appears within 'her dream, his country'," Andrea elegantly raised her long hair and said, "Of course, a barbaric woman such as you

would never understand something like this.”

“What’s ‘your dream, my dream’...”

“It is difficult to communicate with a vulgar person who hasn’t ever even enjoyed the drama, but Lady Tilly must surely have watched this famous drama from the Kingdom of Dawn.”

“There is no need for you to fight,” Sylvie sighed. “I think the reason behind this is quite simple. Usually the common folk do not want to be active during winter because it would increase food consumption greatly, in case they can’t eat their fill it would be very easy for them to catch a cold. However, this issue doesn’t exist in Border Town. The price of grain isn’t high, firewood is also quite abundant, and Miss Lily is easily able to cure a cold. It would therefore be better if they continued to work hard even within the cold and snow, and try to earn one more day’s salary.”

“I am able to understand that there would be enough firewood due to the Concealing Forest West of the town, but the reason for the price of grain not being high... how is that possible?” Andrea asked feeling puzzled, “My family has also been involved in the food business so I know that crop failures caused by natural disasters could lead to everyone raising the price of grain by a lot. With such a bad weather, how could he keep the nobles and merchants from selling food at a higher prices?”

“Nobles, merchants?” Sylvie asked laughingly, “Here in Border Town, there is only one person who is allowed to sell grain, that is His Royal Highness.”

“All those fields along the river belong to him?” Tilly frowned.

“No, that’s the land of the serfs,” she told her what she had seen and heard, as well as the scene occurring during the bumper harvest. “He made two food prices, one was the purchase price and one was the selling price. Those two prices are fixed, with the latter being higher than the former.”

“Isn’t he forcing them to sell low and buy high?” Ashes asked while showing an expression of disbelief, “If he can sell at a high price, why won’t he allow others to sell it at high prices as well?”

“No, it’s not the same,” Tilly said, “After the wheat is taken in, it also needs to be threshed, ground and stored in a warehouse. All this produces further cost, thus it’s normal for the price to rise.”

“What Lady Tilly said is right. I had the same question, so I later asked Teacher Scroll about it,” Sylvie smiled, “She said that the extra expenses were paid off, some were paid to those who deal with the farmers, it is also used to build new granaries so that the production can be expanded, which in turn will provide Border town with new...” she stopped for a moment, thinking about the right word to use, “Jobs, right, that’s what she called them. I heard that His Highness was very concerned about that.”

“But he is still buying weak selling strong,” Ashes stressed, “Shouldn’t trade be free?”

“Perhaps, but His Highness’ selling price is at a rate that still

allows everyone to buy it. Furthermore, if the price stays constant, people will also become more comfortable.”

“Sometimes freedom isn’t always for the best,” Tilly said, she already had a clear idea of what Roland was doing. The rule prohibiting anyone else from selling grain within the territory might at first seem overbearing and unjust. But in fact, it put an end to hoarding and profiteering, which could effectively prevent any events of food shortage. If it was King’s City, which had to face times of snow during autumn, the food prices would inevitably rise up to five or six times more than usual with more than half of the populace starving due to not having enough grain to eat. If the situation went on for long enough, it could easily cause riots, and eventually, the palace might even be forced to release grain from their own reserves or dispatch the guards to suppress them. Either way, it would still be a big burden on the state’s treasury.

Although this policy looked good, it also wouldn’t work just anywhere. The majority of the grain traders were aristocrats and rich merchants who also owned large amounts of serfs and fields, making it impossible for the royal family to buy out all the grain and prohibit people from hoarding. However, here in Border Town, except for Roland Wimbledon, there was almost no other aristocratic family around, he was indisputably the one who had the final say in such things.

When Tilly expressed her own opinion, Ashes still hold some grievances, “What about the serfs? They normally would get more income when the grain price rise, but now they get exploited by fixed prices.”

“Pffft,” Andrea laughed, “As if these people could escape the same exploitation if they were in a city with free trade. At times of bumper harvest, not only wouldn’t they be told to hand over more wheat, they’d even be told to sell it at a very low price. Yet when there is a poor harvest, they’d still have to pay their share, while it would still be a question whether the grain leftover would be enough for them to survive the famine. In contrast, fixed prices are actually more reasonable, as long as the harvest is better, the income should also be better.”

“Here they can choose whether they want to sell.” Sylvie’s words slightly shocked the other three, “His Highness said that in case where the harvest reached a fixed amount, the serfs could be promoted to free people. From then on they can either continue farming or go and choose new jobs, completely according to their own will. However, free people would only need to pay 2/10 of their grain. Furthermore, according to this year’s bumper harvest’s price, their salary was also very impressive.”

“Pro...moted?”

“Uh, His Royal Highness said that after two or three years there won’t be any serfs left in Border Town.”

So, actually it was like this, Tilly’s heart was suddenly touched by what she had heard. That’s the reason why the town is full of vitality... When he made his policies, he considered the people’s way of thinking and added an incentive system to encourage them to work more and better. This way of handling things is completely different from any other noble. Motivation isn’t only expressed through words, rather, he let the people achieve some

tangible benefits through hard work instead of hiding his wealth in the castle treasury.

At this moment, she finally understood the real meaning of those red slogans at the river side.

However, the Roland Wimbledon in the royal palace was never such a generous person... So, is this also something brought forth by the sudden change in memory? In addition, those evening lessons of “Elementary Nature”, and “Mathematics” are very fascinating too.

Tilly had believed that it would be difficult for her to find something new to stimulate her curiosity and interest after she had finished reading all the books in the palace library, but she now had discovered there were still many things left for her to learn.

Within her heart, she suddenly felt that even doing nothing more than just live in Border Town’s castle and flip through all those books filled with miraculous knowledge while watching the changes around the Town... it would still be a very enjoyable life.

Suddenly, a long ringing sound of a bell came over from the city wall, announcing a new demon beast attack.

Tilly immediately put her previous thoughts to the back of her mind, after all, nowadays, she was no longer the worry-free 5th Princess, but rather a leader shouldering the destiny of all the witches living on Sleeping Island. Now, some things could no longer be imposed solely according to her own preferences, thus

she said, “Let’s go to the wall and see if we can help the guards.”

“Of course,” Andrea smiled, “That’s why we came here in the first place, so they can see how we Witches fight!”

Chapter 333 – Defensive War At The New City Wall

When the ringing bell resounded, the entire camp came alive.

Van'er rushed out of the tent and with the flow of people quickly ran to the wall, taking his own combat position. This set of procedures had already been practiced innumerable times, so even if nobody takes command, everybody properly knows that they needed to do next.

It was the same in last year's Months of Demon, when under alert of state each part of the city wall only arranges a few number of patrols, enough so they can cope with two or three scattered demon beasts. If the lookout post observes a large-scale demon beast attack, the alarm will ring.

In the horizon a shadow is approaching, Van'er estimates on the number of enemies being about a thousand or so, remembering about a year ago, the next fight will be a tough one. As a gunman of the flintlock team he is responsible to provide continuous fire, so he must alternate with the other recruit members taking turns filling the guns until the end.

But now, Border Town's power has had dramatic changes.

Cat's Claw opened the artillery's cloth cover and removes the snow, Rodney inspected the field artillery gun tube, and after confirming that there is no foreign body inside he started to load the ammunition. Although the present city walls are changed to

compacted soil, the height and width have increased, and every one hundred meters is equipped with a bombing platform, making the defensive firepower greatly improved.

The corridor on top of the wall is wide enough to allow four people to walk side by side, of the two rows on top of the wall, the first one consists on members of the flintlock team, the second row are the recruits, they are responsible for filling in the cylinder and placing the bullet, then passing it to the front soldiers again.

“Nobody seem bothered by it” Rodney says in the middle of a yawn, “every year in the Months of Demons people go crazy and run frantically, even if they defend Border Town, it doesn’t add any benefits to them, right?”

“It just happens to be a good way to improve our skill,” Nelson said while laughing, “compared with those fixed motionless wooden targets, hitting demon beasts is more interesting.”

“Speaking of target practice, recently I heard an interesting rumor related to our artillery team,” says Jop in a mysterious tone.

“What is that rumor?”

“I heard the other artillery groups saying the groups that is the most accurate will be reorganized into an elite artillery team, and given a brand-new task,” he paused and then said, “has anyone heard anything more about this?”

“Elite artillery team?”

“If you who is more experienced don’t know, how can we know more.”

“Perhaps those are baseless rumors of idle, bored people”

In the artillery group only Van’er has not said anything, after hearing Jop’s words, he cannot help but frown, did some people regard this opportunity to show off their skills?

Sir Iron Axe had looked for him one week ago, and told him the prince has plans to develop new cannon, one which was completely different from the field artillery used now and it would not be used by the First Army, but placed on the ship, converting it to a warship with long-distance range attack capability. The new artillery operators would be the best members of the artillery team, and to join he can apply to Iron Axe.

Van’er agreed without hesitation, this was clearly a further opportunity in the army, according to the arguments of Iron Axe, His Royal Highness the Prince held high expectations for this new branch, which may even be separated from the First Army, becoming a brand-new army. If you can achieve great merits, the future warships will be named after those persons.

This is what glory was about! If a warship was to be called Van’er, he would be satisfied with his whole life. He recalled his life, originally being just a miner, always boasting so he could get food, until finally he could not endure the months of demons and

watched as his brother died in the slums of the Stronghold. But now that he was in the army, he did not need to show off in order to eat or drink again, the uniform was thick and warm; even while returning to his district, the surrounding neighbors would call his name.

All these changes were thanks to His Royal Highness.

What initially was just his decision to join the militia for a boiled egg, turned out to be simply his life wisest choice.

In addition, Iron Axe also asked him if he had any suitable candidates and that he could apply for it together. In other words, these young men may have the opportunity of succeeding, but they are too rash, maybe waiting for them to calm down would be good. Moreover, if they make great merits, these new warships could also be called Jop, Cat's Claw...? That's too difficult to listen to..... Rodney and Nelson can still be considered.

As for the people who disclosed this matter, he must report it to Iron Axe, after all the regulations are very clear on the matter, any news the First Army has, unless a superior explicitly requests, are not allowed to be spread.

"Stop talking, and put all your attention to the battlefield," Van'er coughs two to interrupt the artillery group member's discussion, "do not forget what Sir Iron Axe repeatedly stressed in the class, any mistakes are likely to become irreversible failures."

"Yes!" Everyone said in one voice.

As the solid iron ball killing efficiency is too low, the fighting with a demon beast group starts after is other opposite party is close, firing with shrapnel. When the appearance of the fierce Wolf species crosses over the hundred meters line, the bombing started.

The heat wave blows the snow below the muzzle, the huge roar causes pain in the ears of Van'er, in a distant place a fog of black blood suddenly raises, demon beasts fell down one after the other. Whether it is a wild boar or bear species, their furs provide not enough defense to withstand the iron pellet close bombardment.

“There are more over there” said Cat's Claw pointing to the left front, “red skin wolf species!”

The group moves the cannon agilely, adjusting the muzzle to the target's direction, and after the loading finishes it once again fires, the shrapnel ammo does not need to aim, so long as the target is to the front, can always sweep a large number of enemies. Moreover, the newly-built soil city wall is higher than the stone wall, wolf species have no way to threaten the top, after the first attack this flexible demon beast, it looks like nothing more than a shooting practice.

Then it's finally the turn of the flintlock team, to guarantee hit rate, they always wait for the target to cross 50 meters before opening fire.

The sound of the revolving rifle is not uniform as the flintlock, but it is dense and endless, at the top of the walls white smoke

risers, and as the choking smoke that irritates the nose comes, he cannot help but sneeze.

“This group of idiots, their power is obviously lower but they sure make a lot of smoke” Jop complained.

“But it sure is a time the war is decided by artillery”, Rodney agrees “it was so when we dealt with the knights, and also with the demon beasts it should be the case”

At this time, a rapid bell sounds from the direction of the lookout post, this meant as the early warning of the spotting of a hybrid species demon beast.

Van’er narrows his eyes to focus to the front and sees only two gigantic shadows beyond the smoke slowly moving forward, from the size of the body, it should be a Siege Beast of thick carapace.

“Look at what’s coming” He draws out the corners of the mouth, grinning, “now it’s time for us to show off, change to the solid balls.”

In order to deal with the high defensive power of the enemy, the new shell developed by the factory can pass through the carapace of the enemy even at about two hundred meters, if attacking the wolf species demon beast a moment ago was the warm-up, now it was the official shooting.

“Very well” Van’er claps saying that “lets makes the other

artillery groups have a look at who is the sharpest artillery soldier.”

Chapter 334 – Heart

Andrea had just climbed a corner of the city wall, and saw a scene that shocked her.

She saw a row of soldiers at the top of the wall dressed in uniform clothes, in their hands they held a strange weapon, probably the one Ash referred as flintlock. As the group of demonic beasts approached, the flintlock erupted in flames and thick smoke, with continuous crack sounds reverberating in her ears.

This should be a type of weapon similar to the crossbow, but she cannot see the crossbow arrow that the opposite party launched, probably the reason being all the smoke. The demon beasts at the front came rushing but as if hit severely by something, their body falls to the ground one after another.

But the soldiers have not started cheering for victory, nor they filled the crossbow-like weapon again, but they continue to shoot at the enemy, although the speed of her own bow is a little faster.

“Is this that fearful weapon you talked about?” Andrea felt her lips somewhat dry, “the rate of fire is indeed fast, but the hit chance is a little.....”

“Those people recruited in the first army, were working as miners, farmers and hunters before” Ash interrupted her while saying “the time they have used this weapon is also less than half a year”

A well-trained soldier takes five years to prepare, the archers take longer, even if they take the shortest training time in the crossbow, they still must spend about half a year in order to make a farmer capable of loading arrows without panic of counterattack. As for actual battle? Only God knows if they can hit a target at all, most of the situations would revolve around a strong momentum.

Andrea couldn't help herself to swallow, she was not strange to military training, her family also once trained excessively outstanding Knights, therefore she naturally understood what being ready for actual combat in half a year or so meant. So as long as weapons and food can be fully supplied, Roland could piece together a huge army in a short amount of time, moreover this army would not be so fragile to collapse at the first enemy encounter, taking into account the rate of fire, even a group of elite Knights would have a hard time approaching.

This had nothing to do with the will and courage of the militia, it was the weapon that had made them a powerful force.

“Do you understand how this flintlock works?” Tilly pondered for a moment and then asked Silvy

The latter nodded, “I have carefully observed it many times, it is indeed a weapon similar to the crossbow, the arrow is very short, not having the long shaft nor the tail feathers of a normal arrow. The different lies in the arrow not needing to depend on the tension of the string, but the impact of the black powder explosion making the arrow instantly fly at a very high speed.”

“Black powder?” asked Ash “what is that?”

“Its probably an alchemy product,” she shakes her head, “about the specific ingredients, I am not sure.”

“It should be very expensive,” said Andrea “goods created by an alchemist are never at a bargain price”

Ash curls her lips “no matter how you look at it..... by the way they fire it, it doesn’t look like its expensive at all”

“Wait, what is that thing over there?” Silvy is startled slightly while looking at the battlefield “God, is that also a demon beast? Its heading to the city wall fast! It seems like a giant turtle with a huge shell in its back”

Andrea suddenly became high spirited, “Shell? I fear these flintlocks will have a limited effect on it, as long as I am close to a ten-step range, even the city walls cannot block my magic arrows. Ash, you cover me.”

“OK” Ash shouts, removing the big sword from her back “finally we agree on something, after all I don’t want to lose face in front of Lady Tilly”

“Don’t go” Silvy tried to stop them “they have-”

Andrea couldn’t hear the other half of the words, she only heard a deafening roar, likely a heavenly thunder striking near her ears. Turning her head, atop of the city wall she spotted a carriage with

a big metal pipe spraying a big flame, this time, she vaguely caught sight of the arrow on its trajectory like a shadow flying at lightning speed, towards the body of the demonic beast in the distance.

After a moment's breath, at the sides of the monster several pillars of snow raised violently, only to fall gently at top of the demonic beast, it still launched its attack at its fixed speed making it obvious that the attack did not hit it.

But even so, it was enough to make Andrea extremely surprised..... The distance, had gone far beyond the reach of the longbow and heavy crossbow, "this is....."

"His Royal Highness called it field artillery, simply speaking, its an enlarged flintlock," Silvy loosens the hands covering her ears "Its power is larger than the flintlock, the firing range is also many times more, he used this on the fork of the Scarlet Water River to defeat Timothy's fleet of militia easily."

The demonic beast's luck did not continue, the second round of bombing had two rounds accurately hitting its shell, Andrea saw it very clearly, the uneven shell raised a thin layer of fog after the hit produced a dull sound, at the side of its head there were two big holes with black blood and internal organs flowing out and splashing everywhere.

The fight did not take long to come to an end, before the city wall were the corpses of demonic beasts covering the snow like a thin layer, the warm blood flowing through the snow let out white mist and the soldiers began to work on the aftermath, but she never found an opportunity to fight.

“It seems like I was mistaken” Tilly said with a reluctant smile “he did not need the help of combat witches.”

“The last time I came to this town, this weapon was not popularized, only the Chief Knight had it, now he has made these many..... ” Ash sighed unexpectedly “perhaps this why Your Highness dares to be open about the existence of witches in the town even under the pressure of the Church.”

Andrea unusually didn't say a thing, even if not directed at her she will always try to ridicule or taunt Ash, but now she just felt her heart exceptionally oppressed, and even the strength to quarrel was gone.

Back in the castle, His Royal Highness Roland was still having a sumptuous lunch with the witches.

Seeing the colorful table of various cooked dishes, Andrea felt her heart stop.

The upper nobility of Kingdom of Dawn are fastidious about the beauty in their diet, they are willing to spend a lot of gold royals and energy, purchasing some rare cherished ingredients, and then having them cook in a way to have the most original taste and flavor. Looking at the various dishes in front of her, sprinkling the food with spices and having the meat covered in sauces, was an extremely vulgar practice done in order to cover the flaws the food might have, and in her eyes the dishes having these many defects only meant the taste would be worse.

...

I can't choose..... every dish on the table is terribly delicious.

Like these grilled mushrooms, so plump and juicy, I wonder where does His Highness finds such mushrooms? With a small bite, the overflowing juice is enough to fill the mouth.

There is also this vegetable soup, it looks like a very ordinary clear soup, but the moment you drink it, it has a very thick and fresh fragrance, as if it had lots of chicken, ribs and kelp in it.

The most particular dish was this snack called ice cream bread. The rich milk fragrance overflowing the ice cream clamps between two slices of bread, after a single biting, the cold and soft feeling makes her indulge in an unrestrained way, even though its "winter", it does not prevent her to continue to eat up.

Damn, even this is a complete lose.

Ash looks at her while trying to provoke her with a smile, but Andrea for the first time had no time to respond while wallowing.

Chapter 335 – Dramatic Changes

On the third day, with the completion of the new hot air balloon, also came the day of departure for the ruins exploration.

The new hot-air balloon was named Far Gaze, the gigantic hanging basket could accommodate more witches, and by being surrounded by a canvas encirclement, it could also ward off against the cold wind and heavy snow.

Since the faster they go, the faster they will return, Roland only gave a simple farewell and after the witches boarded the hot air balloon, it lifted off from the castle back garden and set its direction to the Stone Tower.

In case it encountered danger, the balloon could lower its altitude fast in order to meet with the enemies, and this time Far Gaze also flew lowly, passing slightly over Border Town's rooftops as if almost touching them. Most citizen witnessed this "marvelous sight", many people were stunned in place, but also some people shouted loudly Long Live Your Highness Roland because to them, such a miracle could only happen because of Border Town's Feudal Lord. After closing in to the west city wall, the First Army soldiers simultaneously gave them salutes, whether it was Lightning or Macy, they were witches they were familiar with, in particular Lightning who often gave the artillery team directions and guiding, was showered with cheers and enthusiasm from the soldiers.

Soon, with the scattered snow flying in the wind, Far Gaze left behind Border Town and entered the Hidden Forest region.

Tilly stood on the side of the hanging basket, overlooking the limitless forest.

During the Months of Demons the snow continued to fall making the scenery turn into a white world, the dense forest tree tops were all covered in snow making it seem at first glance like ground mounds sprouting here and there. On the other side there was the view of the mountains' top at the distance, appearing with a hazy mist and a tint of blueish-gray color, making it hard to see the point at which the mountain foot connected to the ground, almost as if those mountains were floating in the air.

“What a beautiful view” Shavi said after a sigh, “it’s the first time I see snow covering all over the western region.”

“Are you a western region witch?” Wendy asks.

“I originally lived in Fallen Dragon Ridge, since it’s close to the south, in the winter it rarely snows. Not long ago I heard news about Lady Tilly developing Sleeping Island, so I secretly went and boarded a boat to go to Port of Clear Water to join with the other witches.”

“So that was it” Wendy says shaking her head with a smile, “His Royal Highness the Prince has been complaining about why even after spreading rumors about the Witch Association settling down in Border Town, not even one witch has come..... He was always one step behind.”

“Eh, have you spread rumors to gather witches?”

“They have, what a pity the staff was not experienced, a little after arriving at Fallen Dragon Ridge he caught my attention” Ash says “I managed to bump into him in the Silver Light City. If I remember correctly was he called Tasa?”

“If you are a witch, you will naturally take note of this strange rumor” Andrea grins “if you had not met with Lady Tilly, you perhaps might already be a Border Town Witch.”

“I can’t be with Your Highness Roland”

“Oh” Andrea tries to mock her “Your Highness..... You called him very skilled, right?”

“Ptff” Tilly can’t help it and laughs out, yesterday she looked pretty depressed, but now she seemed to have returned to normal. In Sleeping Island, the only one who dares to pick a fight with Ash is Andrea who has a prestigious family background “no matter if its Sleeping Island or Border Town, every witch is our ally, don’t tease them too much.”

She turns around, reflecting in her eyes numerous witches.

Before they set off, they all understood each other’s abilities so that in case they encounter an enemy, the task allocation can be done properly. It can be said that Border Town combat witches are lower in numbers compared to those coming from Sleeping Island,

even the majority of Border Town's witches are not suitable for combat. But it's also because of their tireless efforts, that the current town now looks the way it does.

Tilly's eyes stopped on Anna. If she were to select the one making the biggest impression on her it would be her, with her deep blue eyes and being the first Awakened witch in the border region, one having really deep affection towards Roland.

As long as she stands next to him you can feel an indescribable peaceful and gentleness, the feeling she had the first time she met her, if she had to put it in words, it would be like lying down on a broad field, with the back on the ground both soft and firm, kind of the feeling of making the people around her feel at ease.

Roland aside, Anna's words are not that many, her expression also shows very little changes, but the presence she has makes her very difficult to be ignored.

Moreover, after listening to Silvy saying that Anna was also Border Town first witch to evolve her powers, had astonishing huge magic power, and can change the shape of her black fire which is unusually strong, and moreover was the first witch to read the «Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science», makes Tilly feel like she found a kindred spirit.

In this winter, if she and Anna were to sit around the fireplace to discuss about magical knowledge and books, she wants to believe it would be a very pleasant thing. Tilly can't help but to look forward to this with anticipation.

The Fifth Princess then looks outside the basket where Lightning is flying, she's Thunder's daughter, she is very similar to the fjord first explorer. Lively, curious and energetic, she was definitely born to fly, Tilly thinks, only under the broad boundless sky she is free to let her heart run wild. Although Thunder hopes her daughter can have a normal and honest life, but after seeing the little girl, Tilly understands that she's destined to become an explorer, and maybe her achievement will surpass those of her father.

The only thing she can do for him is protect her as far as possible.

"We're getting close" just as she was thinking this, Lightning comes close to the basket and notifies everyone.

"Come inside basket and rest" Wendy shows a kind expression "your mouth is already white."

"It's all right, only my face is a little cold" she pats her red cheeks "Thanks to the scarf His Highness gave me, my ears are not cold at all."

Along the way they did not encounter any Devil, the demonic beasts in the forest will occasionally roar once or twice, but they obviously don't have the ability to attack the hot-air balloon, therefore the first half of the journey is fairly smooth. However, when Far Gaze arrives above the destination, everyone was shocked by the current sight.

What they saw was the forest being swept away, with broken trunks and tree branches everywhere, the snow turned over everywhere mixing it together with the soil, a rather messy picture.

“Where is the stone tower?” Ash asked.

“It was there” the area Lightning pointed at was at the center of the cleared area in the forest, like if she couldn’t believe it “it’s..... gone.”

Tilly looked towards the direction she pointed at, among the white snow and brown dirt there was a huge hole on the ground, almost as if someone had pierced the ground making a passage to the abyss. And looking at the size of the hole, the thing that excavates it must be amazingly huge

“Silvy, take a look at the hole and see if you find anything.”

Silvy frowns, making a sort of disgusted face “It’s a.....a huge monster like a maggot , it is moving to northwest, wait, there are ruins in its stomach!”

“What, inside it?” Ash says surprised.

“Yes, I saw the stone roof... and the big ice cube you talked about” she focuses and says “God, it swallowed down the entire tower!”

What should they do next? Everyone's eyes gather towards Tilly.

“Is there anything else besides the maggot monster?” The Fifth Princess lowers the voice a little and asks “especially a Devil.”

“Umm..... There are some demonic beats in its stomach, but they all seem dead.” After Silvy watched for a while, she shakes her head while responding.

After pondering for a moment, Tilly decisively says “We will descend now. A few people must remain outside to defend, the rest follow me into the hole, let's kill the giant beast and recover the ice coffin.”

Chapter 336 – Inside The Monster’s Belly

“Tilly, you can’t” Ash tries to prevent her from going but is stopped.

“Those who want to go down the hole must rely on a flying witch ability” Tilly shows the ring in her finger “although after carrying something heavy the magic power consumption increases, but at least I can take an additional witch, the ones coming need to be able to cope with any situation.” She, moved her gaze to Border Town witches “Anna, Lightning and Macy, I’ll need your help.”

The three people did not object, and the expression of the little girl was of excitement.

Tilly relaxed slightly “The ones who will be going down the hole will be Ash, Shavi and Silvy, the rest of the sisters need to defend the area around the hole.”

“Lady Tilly, let me also go along with you” says Andrea.

“If a group of demonic beasts comes, perhaps Nightingale alone might not be enough” she shakes her head, “is better for you two to be together and coordinate with each other.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep the exit safe” Nightingale says with confident, “Neither devil nor demonic beast will be able to approach this place.”

Tilly considers the scenario, only a few witches can come down, because it depends on the flying witches' capacity for carrying them. The most important thing is recovering the "ice coffin", in case they are unable to open it, it must be carried off, and it seems to be at least equivalent in weight to two or three witches, in that case only Shavi's invisible barrier can hold such a heavy object.

Silvy's Magic Eye is a must, without her, they might be unable to locate the monster and the ruins inside of it. Anna's ability to cut and heat is the same, but they are unable to fly, is a good thing they are light since they can ride on top of Macy after she transform into a demon bird. The last one is the Exceed Ash that can fight in almost any situation, she herself will be carrying her.

Lightning can fly freely, but according to her, once she shoulders another person her height and efficiency will drop dramatically. Her advantage lies in the extremely good mobility and speed and can play the role of a scout, exploring and attacking in case its needed.

The importance of these witches is big, making them irreplaceable, one less and it would make things too difficult. This is not a rash decision in order to go down the hole quickly but one made after careful consideration of the overall situation.

As for Andrea... ...Her destructive power in close range is big, but once in the darkness down in the hole, her ability will be greatly reduced, so it might be better for her to stay with Nightingale above ground and guard against demonic beast that might come wandering.

Tilly has also considered giving up on the rescue and returning to Border Town, in light of the events that happened. But she has this premonition that makes her feel uneasy, why is the surrounding area intact? Why it only attacked the stone tower ruins? And specially the direction the giant worm-like beast is crawling to is to the northwest, towards the mountain range, to an area inhabited by the Devils.

Is there a connection between the two of them?

As the hot air balloon under the control of Wendy and Anna makes a fast land, Tilly clear her head of those distracting thoughts, and after reviewing the plan once more she took a deep breath and said “Lets begin.”

The hole is deeper than she expected, maybe the height of two houses on top of each other, at first it goes straight down but not long after it begins to tilt until it finally forms a horizontal cave, the surrounding soil exudes a foul smell and after approaching it she can see it's covered in sticky liquid, like the traces left behind by slugs.

As they continue to walk deep into the hole, the sunlight quickly vanishes, except for a few torches lighting the way, the rest of the hole is pitch black. Not only that, the howling wind sound turned completely silent and the heavy cold was gradually being replaced by heat from the earth, Tilly could feel her body temperature slowly raising up.

Looking at the torches' flame suddenly flickering, she can't help to tank of it as fireflies.

“The monster is in front of us” at that moment, Silvy said in a low voice.

Even without saying, everybody understood that their target was not far from them, judging from the strange sound that came from further ahead, it sounded like the autumn wind blowing and the rustling of leaves, it seemed like the monster was chewing something.

“I’m landing” the torches in Ash’s hands leave embers behind as if wings, controlling the magic stone, she reduces the height until their feet reached the soft sticky soil.

Afterward Anna’s black fire lights up.

She changed the black fire to a firelight, the cold and soft light gently spilled all around, and under the green flame they saw the tail of the giant beast. It slowly crawls forward; the creeping gray skin constantly secreting mucus makes the foul smell even stronger.

“A disgusting big insect” Ash pulls out her big sword “how should we do it, do I cut open its belly?”

“Wait, let Anna kill it” Tilly shakes her head while saying that “I do not know if there’s any threat, if you approach close with your sword it might be risky.”

“Ok, let me try.” While maintaining the green fire, Anna summoned various black fires in the blink of an eye, the black fire turned into a finger-thick line and flew straight towards the giant beast.

The fine line penetrated the monster’s skin without any resistance and cut a side of its belly. Perhaps the temperature was too high, the moment the black fire touched the skin it suddenly burned up, turning the liquids inside its body into vapor, spraying a white mist. If not for Shavi deploying her invisible shields to protect them, the scattered liquids and mist would have covered them.

This is the power of evolution, Tilly thought, although before setting off Anna had introduced her own ability, seeing it with one’s own eyes caused a shock. It can be controlled freely, the fine line of black fire was sharper than any sword, and it was very difficult to observe while in motion, making it practically impossible to dodge by an enemy.

The monster cried a high-pitched whining sound, it’s body wriggles crazily. But black fire continued cutting forward, and quickly more than half its body had been cut. The flowing liquid did not approach the witches since it was being evaporated by another set of green fires.

The giant beast gradually stopped struggling, its skin also went limp.

“It died” Silvy said “the heart stopped beating.”

“Does this thing have a heart?” Ash asks while holding her nose.

“In the forehead, it’s almost the size of the hanging basket of Far Gaze. Moreover.....” she paused “I could perceive the flow of magic power in it.”

“So, is this a hybrid species of demonic beast?”

“Nobody knows the answer,” Tilly says “in history books and records, things regarding the demonic beasts are extremely few, so there are still many unknown things. Rather, lets hurry and dig out the ice coffin.”

After Anna burns down once more the huge monster, the smell is not as strong as before. Under the guidance of Silvy they find the swallowed ruins quickly, the basement had now turned into hundreds of pieces of stone scattered all over the place so they could not see its original form and after bringing light they noticed most of the magic illumination stones that Lightning mentioned had become a mass of paste. Fortunately, the big crystal-like pillar was still intact and after moving it out of the belly there were no traces of corrosion, inside of it was a female trapped with an appearance as if being alive.

“It’s your turn” Tilly said to Anna.

Chapter 337 – Rescue

Anna nodded, the black fire stretches into a thread and gently reaches the crystal pillar.

The rest of the witches can't help but to hold their breath, and quietly watch as the point of contact lets out green smoke, but is not the smoke that's green, rather the black fire making contact lets out a greenish hue, coloring the smoke above it in different shades of green.

The black fire then penetrates the crystal stone.

“How is it?” Tilly asks.

“A little hard, but I'm sure I can cut it” Anna replies.

However, the “ice coffin” then presents some changes, from the point where the black fire was inserted, like a cobweb, cracks started to form and in an instant covered the entire surface. At the same time Shavi deployed her barrier covering all the witches.

But a shattering blast didn't occur, and as if made of glass, the crystal started to collapse into the ground revealing a cold core, actually the crystal pillar was composed of two layers, the inner one being a real ice crystal. Suddenly everyone felt a chill in the air and the surrounding temperature started to drop.

Luckily, Anna used her fire to keep the temperature from

dropping and made it raise to normal again.

Under the heat from the black fire, the ice crystal melted faster, the transparency also started to drop and the shape was no longer angular, just like regular ice, it started to lose its shape once it started melting unevenly. But Tilly noticed that there was no water being poured into the ground and the melted parts were turning into mist, as if the “ice coffin” had never existed in the first place.

When all of the ice crystal was completely melted, it was revealed the female body that was trapped inside.

She seemed as if she was in a deep sleep, her hair and robes were not showing indications of being wet, like she was never frozen. Losing the support of the ice pillar, her body fell backwards but Ash was there and she fell into her arms.

“Is she alive?”

“Although is very weak, her heartbeat has not stopped” Ash presses her hand on the unknown female’s chest “this is..... simply unbelievable.”

Indeed unbelievable, Tilly discovered that since arriving at Border Town, in less than one week’s time, she had experienced more incredible things than in the whole last year. However, she also feels a little relieved, if she can survive the ice’s low temperature while being trapped inside, it’s almost certain that the other party is a witch.

At the very least, this risky adventure was not for nothing.

As for her name, her origin, and why she was trapped inside of these ruins, those are question that can wait until they return and talk about it slowly.

Andrea was somewhat bored of just defending the hole, from time to time she would glance at the bottom of the hole, hoping to be the first one to see Tilly when she returned.

There was no trace of the Devils around the ruins, and even the demonic beasts were rarely appearing, occasionally from the woods some common wolf species or wild boar species would appear, but before she could draw her bow, Nightingale had already nailed her daggers into their heads.

The passage of time seemed to become slow, in addition to her, around the hole were the other witches of the Witch Association, even if she wanted to talk to them to kill time she was unable to do it. Although the woman called Wendy looked very kind, Andrea had the determination to not talk on her own initiative.

As Dawn’s former upper nobility, being elegant and reserved were essential qualities of unmarried women.

Well, she could look for Nightingale to chat, she heard she once

fought against Ash, but she doesn't know who came on top. If she inquiries about that old match, it will count as gathering information, it'd not be like she's taking the initiative to talk.

Well, this is just work.

She stretches out and pats the snow off her head, and as she's about to start to walk, suddenly Nightingale jumps out and disappears in a heartbeat.

With that curly golden hair, it looked like an elegant noble woman gracefully leaning against the balloon's basket, but in the blink of an eye she now lost trace of her. That reminds her, her ability seemed to be hiding her appearance.

Thinking of what just happened, Andrea calms down and pays close attention to the surrounding sounds. When one can't rely on the vision, the ears and nose become the best way to locate the whereabouts of enemies.

Afterward she heard footsteps mixing among the sound of the wind.

Is it Nightingale?

No, that's not it, Andrea felt goosebumps, the sound of these footsteps obviously didn't belong to a person or a group of people, it came from the forest at the front, about a hundred steps away from her position! But after taking a broad view, it seemed like a

quiet place, not even a shadow could be seen.

The sound of footsteps is closing in, damn, the enemy is invisible!

Just as she's about to warn the others, a thundering sound resonates in her ears.

After the flame appears midair followed by a burst of wind, a strange shaped monster emerges, it has a narrow head as well as a pair of sharp sickles, it looks like a variation of a praying mantis, however it moves differently from the insect, this one was walking erected.

As the arrows from the gun hits it and shatters a side of its face, black blood was sprayed from its skull almost splashing on Andrea.

The monster came crashing to the ground loudly, and afterwards she saw Nightingale's cloak and hood fluttering.

Followed by a second gunshot!

Damn, she was negligent! Andrea clenches her lips, she noticed all of it earlier than herself.

She summoned her magic power longbow, but she actually does not know where she should fire toward, she carefully walks back to the basket, and stands together with the other witches.

Four more gunshots and four more monsters drops dead, stroke down by a single blow.

When Nightingale appeared again at the side of a monster, Andrea puts away her weapon and walks quickly towards her.

“What is this?”

“I’m not sure if is a Devil or a demonic beast” she squats down to inspect the enemy’s body and sickle “from the blood color, it seems like it’s a demonic beast.”

“When did you discover them?”

“From the start” Nightingale smiled, “in the dense fog, their magic power shines like the stars in the night sky which makes them considerably conspicuous.”

“Can demonic beasts have this ability?” Andrea frowned.

The opposite party smiles “Uhh..... it’s probably a special type of hybrid species.”

At this time, the witches that went into the hole also happen to return, and in addition to the seven of them, Ash is carrying a blue haired woman on her shoulders.

“Did you rescue her in the ruins?” Andrea went ahead and said.

“Correct” Tilly nods “Let’s talk about the specifics inside Far Gaze while we return from this forest, it makes me feel restless. Right, did you encounter anything dangerous above ground?”

“A few hybrid species and demonic beasts came a few times but they are all dead” Nightingale shrugs.

The hot-air balloon quickly inflates and lifts off, the hanging basket passing over the tip of the trees, and it began moving towards the town. At this moment, Silvy asks in an alarmed tone “Gee, what are those things below? demonic beasts?”

“demonic beasts?” Andrea pokes her head out and looks in the direction of the ruins, but she couldn’t see anything.

No, there was something on the ground moving, the black blood of the dead monsters was being trampled and scattered, and the snow and soil at some points showed strange swaying from side to side, if one didn’t look carefully it was easy to miss these changes.

“Aren’t they those strange hybrid species?” Nightingale throws a glance at the tunnel “there’s probably over a hundred of them rushing towards the hole... ...Were they attracted by that big bug? Do they want to eat it?” She yawns “well, it’s not related to us anymore.”

Chapter 338 – Police Force

Vader got out of bed and tried moving his body. Surprisingly, his back did not hurt at all, seemed like the words of Sir Knight were right, and after being poured that water the wound indeed healed fast.

“Why don’t you rest for a few more days?” Kukasim asked.

“He only gave me two days” Vader puts on his worn-out coat, and places his feet into the cold boots “Also, the sooner I get to start working, I can get my share of wheat porridge. I can’t always eat from your share, and just one bowl isn’t enough for the two of us.”

“I think it’s actually pretty good, the porridge is much thicker than the relief porridge that other places offer, and you even can taste a little of meat in it” the old man shook his head “Child, you were a patrol member before, so maybe you are not familiar with the life in the slums. The porridge they offered there was watered down, almost like a broth, and in the soup, were no more than a few wheat grains to make it look edible and it was often filled with grass and leaves and then cooked. The wheat porridge that Sir Feudal Lord sends maybe isn’t enough for the two of us to eat until we’re full, but at least we’re not hungry anymore.”

“But I want us to eat until we are full” he smiled while tying his shoelace.

“Alright” Kukasim sighed, “Then take care of your body, and try not to do anything reckless.”

He felt weird, obviously the old man was just a scapegoat the black street mouse had chosen, but now he felt like he had become something like his old man. But what was stranger was the fact he didn't find unpleasant such unexpected feeling.

"I will" He shakes those thoughts and put on a hood "The same goes for you"

Just as he opened the door, standing outside were two men wearing a light blue embroidery on the shoulders and an armband over a white uniform, which indicated they were workers of the City Hall.

Vader cannot help but to frown slightly "Who are you looking for?"

One of them pulls out a paper and glanced at it "Are you Vader?"

"Yes."

"What happened?" Kukasim noticed the situation happening outside.

"Congratulations" the other persons said while smiling "You have passed the preliminary test to join the public security force, next will be one week of comprehensive training" He hands over a small card to Vader "This will be your temporary ID card, bring it to the Second Army camp, there are people over there ready to

receive you.”

His eyes went wide as he stares at it “I... ...passed the selection of the Prince?”

“Not yet” the City Hall worker replied “The written test was only the first round, you still have to complete the training and obtain the approval of the Chief Knight after passing the ideological assessment, then you can become an official member of the Public Security team.”

After they finished, they just left, neither of them had asked for money, nor he have needed to get on their good side, almost as if they just made this trip specially to inform him.

“You succeeded!” The old man yelled excitedly as he patted Vader’s shoulder. “Even after you said that it would be impossible to be chosen.”

Vader stood there frozen still while murmuring “I mean, the questions were too weird”

The old man hesitated to ask “What questions?”

He can’t help to think about the events of the prior week, he knew the Prince was recruiting members for the Public Security Bureau, which was a new name he gave to the town patrol guards, he went to check the requirements and applied at the City Hall for the job. The other side responded quite fast, and in just five days

he received the test notice.

Vader was confident, he not only knew about the announcement beforehand, he also had more than five years of practical experience, and in this small town lacking someone to supervise people, he knew that if he was to be selected, the possibilities were big. If he could become a patrol guard, he not only could live in the city, he could also help Kukasim at any time.

But from the moment he went to take the test, everything went beyond his expectations.

More than 100 candidates sat in the hall, afterwards one Knight started distributing papers one by one and requested the candidates to answer the questions listed and to write in a neat fashion saying that the Prince personally will be the final reviewer of the tests. Immediately the crowd started to get restless, although the announcement clearly stated one of the requirements being able to read and write, nobody had thought it was actually for real.

That caused a large number of people to get scared, although Vader could read what was on the paper, the questions were so weird causing him to go over them again, but they were still the same strange questions, for example 「 You are the coachman of a carriage going on a narrow mountain road, in the carriage are two civilians. Then you spot a group of refugees in the middle of the road ahead, you can't stop, your only options are to hit them or let the carriage fall off the cliff. The former will lead to the death of many refugees, the latter will kill the two civilians on the carriage, and in any case, with your agile reflexes you can survive, what will

your choice be? Please elaborate on the reason why with at least 300 words. 」

This problem had him scratching his head, although one side is mentioned to be civilians, the other side is just a group of refugees, but the concrete numbers are unclear, making him unable to weight his choices. Moreover, he always felt like killing a group of refugees was not a big deal, but that's not necessary the answer the Prince seeks.

Then is the best choice to let the civilians die? Is that really the correct answer?

And in the whole paper, similar questions are written, he even felt like His Highness was just toying with them and making them feel embarrassed, and in fact the personnel for the Public Security team had already been determined.

“Its nothing, it was just something that came to my mind” Vader took a deep breath “Anyway, I’m going to the camp now.”

“Well” Kukasim smiled while he said “I think you can certainly become a splendid Public Security member”

.....

The Second Army camp was located north of the town, just outside the inner city wall, Vader arrived and spotted the Chief Knight awaiting in the camp.

“Starting today, you will begin your training to join the police” said Carter, after all the members had gathered “During one week, you will live in this camp and will receive a special training. Only those who pass will stay, the remaining unqualified people will go back to their original jobs! I’ll teach you all what discipline means, and anything you need to know to work under the service of His Royal Highness the Prince!”

He never counted them, but in Vader’s memory there were around 100 applicants... ..but now there’s only 15 people left? He looked at their expressions and clothes, there was only another like him, the rest were probably local residents.

It really seemed like the requirement about being literate was not a joke.

“Report!” Someone raised a hand to ask.

Carter’s face showed a grin “Oh, are you familiar with the Army’s regulations?”

“Yes, my brother is in the First Army” that person scratched the back of his head and said “Sir, can I ask what is the police? Aren’t we Public Security members?”

“The police is part of the Public Security Bureau, and can be understood as security officers working in Your Highness’ territory, your job is to arrest criminals, fight against illegal acts, maintain the order in the territory and carry out the policies of His

Highness and the City Hall, as well as to help the citizens.”

“Helps the citizens? But a moment ago you said we’ll be serving the Prince...”

“There’s no difference between the two, helping the citizens of His Highness is the same as helping His Highness. Or what, do you want to enter the castle and take care of him personally?” Carter shrugged “First you need become an outstanding Knight to say those sorts of things.”

But a Knight is a noble... ...Vader thought, the status of nobles and civilians is the same as heaven and earth, no matter how much one works, they can’t become one.

“Remember, you are not only the executors of the law, but also the protectors of the people. For now, just go to the tent and change into your uniforms” Carter said as he clapped his hands “Next, I will hand over your first assignments.”

Chapter 339 – Assassins

After Vader took off his jacket full of holes and wore his brand-new uniform, he could feel his body warming up.

The clothes were made of thick leather with a cotton lining, not only were they excellent in retaining heat, but also had the softness of a cotton garment, taking into account only the materials, he was afraid the value of such clothes would be several silver royals.

Although the model is similar to the City Hall uniform, the color is completely different, pure black clothes with a lace white stripe on the shoulders, collar and cuffs, it looked very eye-catching. After the 15 people wearing the new uniform stood in a row side by side, he couldn't help but to held his chest high.

“Good” Carter had a satisfied smile “Now come with me.”

The snow still fluttered in the sky, this was the first time Vader had seen snow falling in the autumn nonstop. The city of Golden Harvest would occasionally have snowy days, but it was at most 1 or 2 and then it would stop, children would often play with the fresh snow stacking it together in the street or rubbing it into a snowball in order to throw it, therefore, the days of heavy snow were viewed as a holiday in childhood. However, it was a very inconvenient for the grown-ups, the snow would moisten the shoes making them moldy, the streets were filled with snow making them difficult to travel, nobody even cared to open shops to do business and occasionally the snow's weight crushed the roof of a house.

On these times, the town patrol would decide not to go out and would rather find a tavern, they would all sit around the fireplace, and while drinking warm wine they would flirt with the waitresses.

But all of that, can't be seen in Border Town.

Every day some people would clean up the streets, sweeping the snow to the sides of the road, this was a long-term recruitment issued by the City Hall, you can work per day or in a monthly basis, and although the earnings are low, it's a quick and easy way to get money.

There were many townspeople coming and going on the streets, some of them wore a straw hat, others walked with a cloak covering them from the snow, but all of them were busy. If the snow on the streets is removed, then the town liveliness was not all that different from the summer.

If he were not to witness this view, Vader could not have believed that such a small town at the border of the kingdom would seem to be busier than the City of Golden Harvest. If it weren't for the lack of a church and the missing, tall bell tower, he might have thought he was staying in a big city like the City of Golden Harvest.

Soon, the group arrived at the wharf, the Scarlet Water River had more than 10 ships anchored, and at its shore were hundreds of people gathering, like a sense of déjà vu Vader thought, when he arrived with the other eastern region refugees, it was the very

same picture.

“Question! These people are.....”

“Refugees from the south and northern lands, the Prince sent for them to come to Border Town, in order for them to survive the winter. Your duties are to assist the City Hall maintaining the order, making the people form a line to go through the inspection checkpoints one by one, then the quarantine and registration.” Carter told them “currently the members of the police are few, so the First Army soldiers will assist you at first, but after that the works need to be done completely by you.”

“Yes!”

It doesn't sound too difficult, and seems to be not much different from making the refugees queue up to get porridge. As Vader got close he started shouting to get the attention of the nearby people, directing them as they came closer.

“Name? Where do you come from? Can you write and read?”

As each refugee passed the checkpoint, they were inquired by the City Hall personnel, roughly recording their answers. Vader knows these are only the preliminary statistics, and once they settle down there will be further questions and verification, and those who are competent in a specific job will be moved to the inner city, this is a process he has personally experienced once.

Suddenly, coming from behind he heard the sound of tumult, and as Vader turned his head, he saw a man wearing a long robe surrounded by guards, arriving at the wharf area. The long ash-gray hair flustering in the wind showed his real identity as the Feudal Lord, His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon. Additionally, standing at his side was a splendidly dressed person, he should be the person in charge of the City Hall.

He never thought the Prince will come to personally watch the refugees, among all this wind and snow, which makes Vader feel slightly surprised, in the severe cold season most of the big nobles even struggle to leave their warm beds, especially when they have servants that can cope with most situations.

“I’m called Mane, I come from the north lands, uh... ...what I’m good at is farming, no, I can’t read or write.”

“A farmer?” The City Hall official checked the corresponding square in the sheet of paper “ok, next one.”

At this moment, Vader noticed that person took a side glance at the direction the prince was standing, in his eyes was not a look of awe, and was completely different from the eyes of ordinary people.

“Wait” he subconsciously opened his mouth.

“What is it?”

“Are you a farmer? When are the winter wheat crops ready to harvest?”

The City Hall official also looked at him, with a face full of impatience “For now this is only the initial registration, we have no time to ascertain if the things he’s saying are the truth. Hasn’t Sir Carter clearly explained you the process? Your job is only to help me maintain the order.”

Listening to him the other man immediately closed his mouth.

What an idiot! Vader frowned and paid no attention to the official “Your accent is not like that of a northern resident, it’s a little more like what you’d hear in the central area of the kingdom, from what city did you come from? I’m pretty familiar with the northern cities.”

Mane hesitated for a bit, but still did not answer.

“Also, your clothes, dressing like this in the north, even if you don’t freeze to death, your hands should be frozen since the climate over there is always below freezing point” Vader grabbed his right hand “And where are your gloves? Don’t tell me you find Border Town’s temperature so warm that you had to throw them away.”

At this point the checkpoint staff also noticed something was wrong, if he was to lie about something, he might as well could make it look like he was good at something in order to get better treatment, but concealing his own origin was a very strange

behavior. “Where did you come from?”

Mane clenched his teeth, suddenly pulling a red ball from his bosom and tossing it into his mouth, then yelled “you discovered me!”

Vader suddenly felt the man’s wrist become boiling hot, his body automatically acted to push Mane to the ground, but noticed that even if he used all his strength, the other man was still unmovable. Afterwards Mane raised his hand, throwing Vader into the air.

He fell heavily to the ground, his back aching with burning pain. Damn! The wound opened! he spat to the ground and with his head still dizzy, he crawled while trying to stand up, but Mane was no longer there.

Among the crowd of refugees around 45 people jump out, with movements as agile as those belonging to the demonic beasts outside the wall, and started running across the temporary checkpoints, going straight to the building housing the Prince.

The goal of this group of people is obvious, they came to attack Border Town high level officials and its Feudal Lord.

Thinking of the sudden monster strength displayed by Mane, Vader can almost imagine a scene of the Prince’s guards being torn to shreds, and even if he is the Prince, it might prove difficult to escape from such situation.

However, none of that happened.

He soon heard the sound of a series of blasts, just like when the soldiers are resisting the demonic beasts at the wall, and the same scene unfolded.

In front of the Prince, white smoke started to raise up.

The head of Mane turns into a bloody mess, he and the rest of assailants all fall to the ground among the smoke.

Chapter 340 – Reason For Being Chosen

As the people that rushed out of the crowd were killed, the sudden development brought panic to the refugees, watching dozens of soldiers carrying strange weapons gathering around, an air of unrest started to spread, the situation was becoming more and more hard to control. At this moment, the clear voice of the Prince suddenly resounded loudly over the crowd.

“Quiet, my people. I’m your Feudal Lord, Roland Wimbledon. For now, listen to what I have to say”

Although the voice is loud, it was not a desperate yell, but one showing his calm and steady state of mind. Vader felt like the Prince was talking into his own ear, and his voice carried unquestionable strength, instantly calming down the earlier scene of panic.

The crowd suddenly went quiet.

“It is exactly as you heard, Border Town will provide you with shelter to ward off the snow, food to fill your belly and numerous well paid jobs. I’m here to tell you, all of these are true.”

“The house is a thick earth-made room, with no gaps to let the cold air in, and under the bed is a charcoal stove, making you sleep as comfortable as if you were laying in a summer sunbaked field. As long as you close the door and windows, you can be inside your house wearing only undergarments, and not feel the cold at all”

“Along with housing, the food you’ll receive consists of wheat porridge, when you dig your spoon in it you’ll see the grains dripping, and as you pour it into your mouth you will feel the thickness as it goes down your throat, it’s guaranteed as long as one bowl can fill your belly.”

When he heard this, Vader suddenly felt his stomach grumble. The actions of the Prince were very novel, he was not like most nobles, repeatedly emphasizing his own authority over his people and claiming that everyone must obey his rule, but was more concerned about the views of the common people, going all the way to fulfill his promises, and by looking at the wistful expressions of these people, he knew the Prince’s word had undoubtedly touched the people’s hearts.

“My goal is to have all the people in the world live a good life without worrying about food or clothing, but there are many enemies lurking in the shadows who don’t want to see this happen, these assassins we just fought without doubt were sent by them, the reason is very clear, they don’t want to see me alive, nor they want my citizens to enjoy comfortable lives.”

“If I’m gone, will the next Feudal Lord provide you with housing and delicious food? You should all be aware of what will happen in that case. I’m the only one willing to do so.”

Vader found the panic had already dissipated. When those men acting like wild beasts were regarded as simple enemies, the worries and anxiety of the refugees turned into anger pointed at those who tried to harm the Prince, they were villains who tried to destroy their happy lives, such kind of people could never be

forgiven.

“In order to avoid the attack happening again, the inspection needs to be done one more time, this time the ones in charge will be my personal guard, don’t give the enemy a chance destroy the things we have built!”

Everyone had complied with His Highness’ will, the men who had already crossed the checkpoint were brought back to the wharf by the guards, and nobody protested and was moving in a more orderly manner than before.

He is indeed a Prince, Vader couldn’t help but to think that, just a few words were all it took to extinguish the earlier panic.

“I heard you were the first one to discover the irregularity?” Carter Lannis walked up and said “Come with me, the Prince wants to see you.”

He followed the Chief Knight, and after arriving in front of the young prince, he knelt down in on knee “I offer you my greetings.”

“Tell me, how did you find out that there was something wrong with him?” The prince asked.

Vader reports his findings truthfully.

“Very keen powers of observation, were you just an ordinary civilian before?”

“No, Your Highness. I once served as a patrol leader in the City of Golden Harvest” he replied honestly “for almost six years, until the city was attacked by a large number of pirates.”

“But you don’t have any special skill listed in your resume’s history” said the prince “I asked Carter, and he said you are still living in the temporary housing, in other words, when the City Hall began the population registration, you hid your experience, which was totally unnecessary. Why?”

Although he didn’t understand the meaning of the word resume, it did not affect him and he answered the question, after Vader hesitated for a moment, he told the prince about Kakushim “If it were not for him, I might’ve not arrived at Border Town, but he was a criminal so I cannot leave him alone in the west district.”

“Therefore, you want to be a patrol member, so you can cover for him in the future, as you carry out your inspection missions?”

“I...” Vader’s chest suddenly tightens, from what he saw before, the Prince is very concerned about violations of the system, and it’s even clear to himself that his actions are clearly suspicious.

“You don’t have to worry, you haven’t done anything, and I won’t punish you just for having that idea.” The other side had totally seen through his thoughts, and said with a smile.

However, to Vader that remark had a hint of disappointment, and without doubt the Prince did not agree with such practices,

even if he flawlessly became a police officer, once his judgement became biased, he would be no different from the corrupted Town Hall clerks.

“Do you have a family?” The prince suddenly asked.

“...They were killed in the City of Golden Harvest during the pirate raids.”

“What about Kukashim?”

“He shouldn’t have one either” Vader replied, puzzled over why was the Prince asking such questions “if he had one, I doubt the mouse would have chosen him to be the scapegoat.”

“Those who have any special skill, are allowed access to the rental of community housing, and can obtain identification documents from the City Hall, making them equals to all the citizens. Naturally, that also includes their family members” the prince smiled “you should be able to understand what I’m trying to say, right?”

Vader was startled and couldn’t hide his surprise “You agree to let Kukashim...”

“Take the old man to the City Hall to register, they will help you with the procedures.”

Barely holding up the excitement, he went down on one knee

again “Your Highness is very benevolent!”

“Don’t relax, keep being as alert as you were today” the prince nodded “If you can’t pass the following examination, even if you become a family, you can only live briefly in the temporarily residing zone.”

“Yes!”

With the matter weighting in his heart finally gone, Vader felt relaxed and as he prepared to leave, he suddenly remembered the matter about the written test. After hesitating for a moment, he couldn’t help to ask “Your Highness, in the preliminary test there were a lot of questions that I didn’t know the answer to. Why did you still select me?”

“Because they had no right answer” the Prince grinned lightly “all the answers varied from person to person, the key to the test was not the answers, but it was to test the literate level of the applicants and their ability to write. As long as you can identify the problem and write your own ideas, you were qualified on the test.”

Chapter 341 – Transport Corridor

“Your Highness, do you know who sent these people?” As Vader left, Carter approached to ask.

“The ones currently in possession of that pill, besides the Church are Timothy and Garcia, but Garcia is currently away from Greycastle.” Roland sighed “compared to her, the possibility of it being Timothy is more likely, he is now afraid to send a large army and leave the capital unguarded, but that does not mean he would not retaliate.”

Fortunately, the attackers mixed in the crowd were only carrying pills and were not hiding gunpowder in their bodies. Otherwise if they detonated it in the crowd, the effort they put in these last two months would be in vain.

Roland was not worried about his brother’s dispatched “suicide squads” threatening himself, even if Nightingale was not around these days, every time he went outside he was surrounded with more than ten personal guards, he also wore a God’s Punishment Stone. Aside from the Berserker’s Pill addicts, even an Exceed witch would have a hard time approaching him under the fire of ten revolving rifles.

He discovered that since he took the seat of Feudal Lord around a year ago, his mentality had changed greatly. When he first arrived here, he inevitably felt overwhelmed and weak on the legs. But a moment ago, although he felt a little anxious, he still tried to show calmness on the surface, he knew that the guards would definitely go ahead of himself, desperately trying to stop the attackers, but

he, as the focus point of the people's gaze had to remain unperturbed, he found this fact very surprising.

“Call the messengers and ask about the details of their recruiting” Roland turned towards Barov and said “I need to know where these people boarded the ships”

“Yes, Your Highness.” The City Hall Prime Minister complexion was a little gloomy, he did not expect the staff he proudly selected would make such a significant mistake, he felt very ashamed.

“You don't have to be too hard on them, first clearly ask about the situation.”

When the refugees all went through the checkpoint, Roland returned to his office in the castle. The news brought back by this messenger group about the southern region made him particularly pleasantly surprised, there was a large number of people who lost their home, Eagle City and the Port of Clear Water were destroyed in the flames of war, many of the crop fields outside the city were abandoned. In addition to this year's sudden bizarre weather, the temperatures in the area of Greycastle were plummeting, the price of grains was soaring, and even the price of slaves was falling in half.

As long as he can establish a reliable transport corridor, these people could be brought into the west. In fact, according to the messenger's report, after hearing about the development of Border Town and the efforts to recruit them, many refugees started to spontaneously moving towards the western region.

The difficult part, however, lied in this “transport corridor”.

The heavy snow of the Months of Demons had sealed completely the land traffic and communication, if he were to bring these people, the only choice would be by ship through the Scarlet Water River, but Border Town only has Little Town as ship and it's unable to move without the help of a witch, if he were to meet the demands of the people, and have ships frequently moving through the river, he would need to invest in at least 20 river sailing vessels.

For example, the group of messengers sent in this time's mission faced such dilemma: only a small portion of the gold royals were used in order to win over the refugees, the rest was spent on hiring boats and inn fees. Currently, apart from the 400 refugees who arrived at Border Town today, there are still over 3,000 people stranded in Willow Town, Silver Light City and Fallen Dragon Ridge, awaiting to get on a ship.

In addition, the ship owners were aware of the current situation of Border Town, so the price of boarding a ship was very high, and taking into account these 3,000 people, the estimated cost would go over of that of the rescue operation in King's City during the plague, so this was not a long-term solution. As Roland went over the meeting again, he decided to send a letter to Margaret of the Chamber of Commerce, hoping that if she gets to see Lightning, she might not charge double the price as the normal ship owners.

However, if he really wanted to cut down on the spending, they would need to build their own boats. The shipbuilding skills

definitely improved and with a greater quality steel beams and cement, it was now possible to build a stronger, larger hull for the flat-bilge ship, and using the steam engine to power it, this could mean the birth of the Scarlet Water River line of communication.

.....

After lunch, Barov knocked on the door and entered “Your Highness, the situation now is roughly clear.”

“Speak.”

“One of my disciples called Salem, who was responsible for going to the norther region to rally refugees, went back because he lacked a boat, so he traveled to King’s City to contact an old friend of his, hoping that he could help him find a ship or a merchant willing to sail to the western region.” Barov sighed “the news should have spread out from there... He gathered the refugees in Silver Light City, which is about half a day travel from the capital, if Timothy wanted to meddle in, it shouldn’t have been difficult.”

“How many people are currently stranded in Silver Light City?”

“Around 800 or so” Barov responded in a low voice “The merchant ship takes half month for the round trip, when the next batch of refugees arrives, is not clear what the situation would be. Or... maybe we should recall the First Army units and give up on these people.”

“No, no matter how many people Timothy sends, we won’t reject anyone, as long as the verifications are done properly at the checkpoints, we can discern them from the rest” Roland shook his head “If we abandon the refugees in Silver Light City, once they go back to their homes in the northern region, won’t they start spreading their bitter experiences? In that case, nobody there will want to join us anymore.”

Under Sylvie’s magic eyes and Nightingale’s lie detection, no scout or assassin could evade them, so he was not worried about it, as long as they didn’t hurt the other refugees.

“Yes, Your Highness” Barov cleared his throat and asked “About... Salem’s punishment, you see...”

“What do you think?”

He hesitated for a moment “This issue happened because he was extremely careless, I would suggest removing him from his position in the City Hall or a fine of two months of salary. Salem’s mistake was not intentional, and it also didn’t cause too much damage, so I think sending him to the North Slope Mine is too much.”

Roland can’t help but to laugh, the other side had a pained expression “Rest assured. Considering this mistake was done because of inexperience rather than negligence in a subjective sense, he can be dealt with in a more lenient way. After all, it’s the first time he has held this position... I remember he is just over 20 years old, right? That being the case, after this lesson I’m sure he will grow up quickly. The punishment of two months of salary is

good enough.”

“By your will” Barov bowed “I’ll immediately let him know.”

The prince smiled while shaking his head, although in the beginning he was too harsh and always ready to punish, his face obviously showed concern for him and when he went to the capital he wanted to follow Salem, after all he was his first disciple. And probably, in the eyes of Barov, he was the same as his own children.

“Let’s get to it.”

After finishing this matter, Roland stretched out. He took out several sheets of paper from the drawer, and as he was getting ready to start sketching the schematics for the steam engine of the new cement boat, Leaf suddenly ran in.

“Your Highness” she excitedly said “Far Gaze came back!”

“Really?” Roland stood up and followed her to the back garden. He saw the huge hot air balloon descending slowly, the shadow cast by the big air bag engulfed the courtyard.

As soon as the basket touched the ground, Anna jumped down. Roland opened his arms and slowly went forward, and while smiling she hugged him.

“I’m back”

Chapter 342 – Countermeasures

– “Me too.”

Lightning threw herself to Roland.

– “I want a hug too.”

Nana exclaimed as she joined.

– “Guuu!”

And Maggie followed.

Roland simply stood in place, so that all the members of the Witch Union could hug him one by one, seeing such sight Tilly couldn't help but to laugh.

– “It seems like your relationship with them is quite a harmonious one.”

– “Do you also want to hug your dear older brother?”

Tilly shook her head and said with a smile.

– “No, thanks. I can still remember clearly the last time you tried to hug me, you threw me into the ground.”

Roland innocently shrugged his shoulders, then moved to check on the sea-blue haired woman Ash was carrying on her arms, she didn't seem to be too young, her body seemed more similar to that of Anna. Her eyes were closed, she had slender eyebrows slightly upturned, her skin was fairly white, and had a mole next to the corner of her eye making her particularly eye catching.

Looking at her from the outside, she didn't look like a prisoner trapped at the basement of a stone tower at all, but just a simple sleeping beauty.

However, contrary to her appearance, what Roland cared the most were her clothes, he found rare to find such intricate and exquisite patterns, because the lack of dyes on the current society, the base color of the robe being purple was extremely rare, paired with the interlaced stripes and talismans, it was a magnificent robe, like the ones you would see in a movie.

This is definitely orange quality equipment.

– “Is she still alive?”

Nightingale then responded to Roland.

– “Yeah, but the magic in her body has been all depleted, it looks like a condition similar to what Anna experienced in her coming of age. But unlike Anna, her magical recovery is very slow, it may take around 34 days to reach normal levels.”

Roland then nodded as he spoke.

– “That being the case, let’s assume she is just in a deep sleep. I will have a room cleaned up on the third floor of the castle, the others should return to the main hall first.”

He paused for a moment and said.

– “I would like to hear the stories of your trip.”



After listening to Tilly and Nightingale, Roland couldn’t help but to feel worried about them.

Although Sylvie was there to offer a whole picture of the situation, going underground in pursuit of a never seen before huge demonic beast was a very dangerous thing.

If I was thrown into that situation, perhaps I’m afraid I would hesitate to act.

He would never have imagined Tilly would be so decisive, she selected the appropriate witches, and personally lead the team... He could see she didn’t became the leader of so many witches just because of her identity as a princess.

– “Do you believe this worm is related to the Devil?”

– “I don’t know, but it’s a possibility, the Devils the witches of the Cooperation Association encountered were riding some kind of hybrid demonic beasts, they had their meaty wings chopped off, and were obeying the Devil’s commands, like some sort of tamed animal. Also, behind the snowy mountains, you could see flying beasts with a shape different from the Devils, perhaps those are also demonic beasts.”

Tilly answered and after pausing for a moment she continued.

– “So, it is possible to guess the relation between the Devils and the demonic beasts is one of subordination, like how humans and hounds are. Could they possibly make these monsters obey their order by some method and have them perform more complex tasks?”

Roland responded with a nod.

– “Indeed... it does seem like it”

But he had this feeling of confusion and incomprehension in his mind. It is only in the Months of Demons that the demonic beasts will attack the human inhabited areas on their own accord, but that does not mean they can only live for a year since the moss and weeds found on the carapace of the siege demonic beasts showed it had been alive for dozens of years.

If the reason the Devils can't occupy the open land, expelling humanity from the mainland, is because they are confined to the region with red mist, but they could always send the demonic beasts to harass the four kingdoms, rather than having to wait until winter each time.

Another thing was...

It was hard to forget the first year's Months of Demons of Roland, the Wolf Lion hybrid demonic beast that Iron Axe fought with, was different from a clever animal, it had been able to learn, analyze and choose the best course of action to attack its prey, an intelligence the vast majority of wild animals could never reach. If the hybrid species of demonic beasts had grown to display such intelligence, it would be impossible for another race to tame them.

Tilly sighed with a worried face.

– “But rather than the underground beast, I feel more worried about the enemy Miss Nightingale met with outside the stone tower. If it can conceal its body during daytime and act quietly, it would be virtually impossible to guard against it. It's a pity we have such little knowledge about the demonic beasts, I have no idea how we should deal with this terrible enemy.”

Roland relaxed his hands as he spoke.

– “If not for Nightingale personally seen it, I would not have believed such thing existed, but they never seem to have appeared in the western region, otherwise, with each passing winter,

Longsong Stronghold should have turned into ruins.”

– “But the longer the Months of Demons are, the stronger the demonic beasts become, this is the conclusion reached by the history books. This year, the snow began to fall in the autumn, the enemy we will face may be very powerful.”

This we made Roland’s heart feel warm, whether Tilly looked onto him as a brother or not, at least she viewed him as an ally, she wanted to aid this small town, and regarded it as for the sake of the witches.

– “So, the only one who can monitor the defense line is Nightingale.”

Tilly stopped him.

– “No, let Sylvie in charge of the vigilance this winter. The city wall is divided into two sections, even if the patrolling time took half a quarter of hour, the workload of Miss Nightingale would be too big. As long as Sylvie stays in the castle, she can observe the entire region of the city wall, and if she discovers a demonic beast, she can inform the other witches immediately.”

Roland nodded in acknowledgement.

– “Sounds reasonable.”

Scroll hesitated for a moment before speaking.

– “This new witch... I still have the same opinion, until we confirm her identity, she could very well be an enemy.”

Roland faced her and said.

– “I know; therefore, I will have her wear a God’s Punishment Stone for the time being as a countermeasure, I hope this will not make her misunderstand us.”



Roland entered the room of the sleeping witch, inside only Anna remained, taking care of her.

– “How is she?”

Anna shook her head.

– “Still no response.”

– “Ok”

Roland arrived at the bedside, the woman lied quietly under the bedding, although the eyes were still closed tightly, her countenance was getting better. Nana and Lily had used their abilities on her, so the only thing they could do, was to quietly wait.

– “It’s really incredible that after being frozen for so long, her body still remains in perfect condition.”

Anna chuckled a little.

– “Although I’m proud of my flames, her ability is definitely significant.”

Roland approached and patted Anna’s head.

– “I heard you cut open the ice coffin. You are awesome, Anna.”

She honestly expressed her thoughts.

– “I’m not the awesome one here. This witch used her ability very cleverly, first she lowered the temperature of her body so that the body cycles stopped and was frozen solid, then she completely sealed the cold ice inside with an ice crystal of a temperature closer to the outside, so that the interior ice would not melt down. As for her ability to control her powers, she certainly had reached a very high level.”

Ice close to ambient temperature, huh... this sounded very illogical, but Roland understood the Summoning type witches’ ability was the manifestation of magic power, like shapeshifting and the temperature of the black fire.

Anna paused for a moment and then continued.

“Just as I was cutting the outer layer of the ice crystal, the whole ice coffin was immediately torn apart, as if she deliberately left a flaw in the ice. So, I think she had expected this to happen someday.”

– “You mean... “

– “She will certainly wake up.”

Chapter 343 – Re-Starting Time

– “Master, the city wall has been breached, I’m afraid the army coalition won’t last long! We have to get going!”

She was able to hear the sound of the battle taking place outside, and by taking a look outside the window of the high tower, she only saw the dark clouds in the sky, revealing a red gloomy glow, as if they were wrapped in sticky blood.

– “But my younger sister has not come back.”

The tone of Kraft was getting more and more anxious.

– “She is a soldier of the garrison, it is impossible for her to leave her post and abandon the defense line arbitrarily, if you die here, she would feel like her job was in vain!”

With a half hesitant voice, she finally agreed with a nod.

– “I know.”

The streets were full of escaping people, the guards maintaining the order among this chaos were doing a poor job, the streams of people all converged into a big mass, involuntarily throwing her with the rest towards the South Gate, Kraft was following close by her side, warding her from the panicked crowd with his sturdy body.

It was a total disaster.

Is this the result of our efforts?

She looked behind her at the Tower of Babel, the highest point in the city, and the central point of the Federation.

Flying Devils carried wild demonic beasts to the top, in an attempt to capture the Tower, occasionally a flash of lightning could be seen, taking down an enemy.

But it was not enough to help keeping the enemies at bay since there just were too many.

After several hundreds of years of construction and development, this city had become the most flourishing of the fertile plains, the Holy City.

Today, however, it was being destroyed in an instant, regardless of the effort several generations were making, as if it was just a sand castle built by children in an afternoon, and after only a blink, everything had turned into chaos and disorder.



Across the South Gate, the Devils suddenly arrived blocking the people running away, those who could fight immediately went to the front, and joined with the guards to fight.

But the other side not only had demonic beasts, but also Dreadheart Demons and Lords of Hell, the strength gap from one side to the other was just too big.

After the first wave of spears was thrown, dozens of people lied down in pool of their own blood, some had its abdomen pierced by the iron spears, holding their hot intestines from spilling out into the cold snowy ground, some had their hands or feet cut off, holding the wounded area, wailing in pain.

Kraft grabbed her.

– “Master, where are you going?”

She gasped for air as she responded.

– “I can also fight, let me go!”

– “I can’t do that, you are far more important than them, are you not?”

– “Let go!”

Her magic power gushed out, the cold air started to overflow, she turned her shaking hand around and opened it, then, without looking back, she started to stride forward.

When she saw the hundreds of enemies wearing a fierce armor, dripping with blood, she felt her heart tightening.

But even so, she was not willing to stay hidden behind the crowd, she was a Witch of the Holy City, if she were to finally die, she should die in the battlefield!

– “Step aside!”

At this moment, on the side of the battlefield a clear roar resounded, a person fell from the sky, as if a god had descended.

She stood up, and raised the huge sword on her back on one hand. Her red-brownish hair, fluttering like a flame, instantly ignited the hope in the heart of all the people.

– “The Holy Warriors of the Federation!”

– “She is... a Transcendent!”

Among the sound of people’s astonishment, light began to flow into the sword blade, soon, the body of the sword was shining golden like a dazzling new sun, sprinkling the earth with its glorified rays, even the red dark clouds dared not to undermine its glow, and those clouds reflected countless golden tassels.

As the light rose up to its climax, the witch leaped forward, waving her sword against the incoming Devil.

There was silence.

In that moment, time seemed to have stopped, as if being absorbed by all that bright incandescence, the opposite figured disappeared, like the darkness being wiped out by the break of dawn.

Same with the other Demons, the Lords of Hell, they all collapsed in this avalanche of light.

When she opened her eyes, the snowy ground had turned into scorched earth, and the sight of enemies vanished as if they never existed.

As the other Devils watched the scene, they started to retreat, more Holy Warriors arrived and joined in, chasing the fleeing enemy, breaking the encirclement.

– “You guys go now!”

The witch holding the sword said as she knelt down on one knee and gasped for air, as if she had exhausted all her strength.

– “Take advantage of now and hurry out of here!”

In response, some people in the crowd asked.

– “But... where do we go, My Lady?”

Yes, where do we go?

She bitterly thought, even the last Holy City was under attack by the Devil, tens of thousands of people had died, and after exhausting all methods, they could never recover from such a defeat.

The red-haired witch said with a firm tone.

– “Do not give up, we still have hope! Over the mountains and across the river, onto the wild lands.”

– “But... there are only a few uncivilized people living over there.”

– “We can recast the order, as long as we survive, this will be our victory!”



– “Master, why didn’t you go together with them?”

She took a few people out of the crowd and hurried towards the west.

Apart from Kraft and the family bodyguards, the rest were basically non-fighters, they were her retinue of the tower and her servants.

– “I left some important documents and magic stones in the experimental building of the Concealing Forest, since they are important if we want to rebuild our old order, I need to bring them over to the other side of the mountains.”

Someone then yelled.

– “The Devils are coming!”

Kraft gave an order.

– “Hammer Stone, you go and block them.”

– “Yes!”

She gritted her teeth, lowering her head as she kept advancing. These mortals can only slow down the Devil, there is no way they can defeat such an opponent.

If this goes on, I’m afraid I’ll be the only one left.

But she had to leave them, and get to the destination as soon as possible.

Somehow, there were black and white patches in the sky... the sight was becoming blurry.



She was panting following after Kraft, even if she was as strong as he, it had been three days since they started crossing rivers and mountains, making her feel weary.

She gazed behind, from the team of more than 30 people, only six remained left.

Some people fled halfway, but other were heavily injured and separated from the team on their own accord, if they were to suffer another attack by the Devil...

Kraft had totally seen through her thoughts as he said.

– “Rest assured, Master, I’m here. I will try my best to stall them.”

– “Why?”

Kraft was a little stunned by her question.

She was puzzled as she continued.

But in the family's steward, she saw courage and tenacity, so it was not true that all the common people were incompetent. In fact, even if he didn't have a witch to guard his side, he worked together with the rest of them, to at least give her a change to get inside this Stone Tower.

That being the case, why did the civilization completely collapsed more than 400 years ago?

The roar of the Devil suddenly resounded outside the door.

Damn, they came faster than expected.

Her vision was cloudy, and countless spots fluttered in the air in front of her, almost filling up her field of view.

She can't die here, she must take her research results with her, since they are important if they were to rebuild their old order, she needs to bring them over to the other side of the mountains, into the savage lands!

She grabbed an Echo magic stone, and after injecting some magic into it, recorded a few words, asking for help.

The wooden door broke asunder with a loud noise, the Devil had broken in.

Hoping that someone would hear her plea for help and come rescue her, she started circulating magic power through her whole body, the sudden changes made a burst of cold frost pour out.

The Devil raised its spear, his arm suddenly swelled up. In the next moment, the sharp spear-shaped weapon flew in the air towards her.

She couldn't help but to close her eyes, the black and white spots covered everything, after her sight turned to darkness, the sound also disappeared.

Her body no longer felt cold, as if wrapped in soft velvet, almost like if her body was no longer in that dark, cold basement, but instead lying over the warm grass, the pain of her body being pierced never came.

Did I die?

After a long time, the curtain of darkness started to rise, her sight started to get more and more bright, as she tried to open her eyes, what welcomed her was a hazy grey ceiling being reflected on her eyes.

She heard someone say:

– “Your Highness, she has awoken.”

Chapter 344 – Past (Part 1)

Your Highness?

What a strange sounding name... It's like a word you would hear in an old story.

She tried to turn her eyes, after directing her gaze to the side, she saw a grey-haired man entering her field of view, at his side stood several women.

He said in a low voice almost whispering.

– “How do you feel?”

– “.....”

She did not answer, but instead asked.

– “Where is this?”

– “The western region of the Kingdom of Greycastle, Border Town.”

Well, things were going in the direction she wanted to see the least, unknown location, unknown time, unknown figures, she wanted to stand up from the bed, but found that her body was very weak.

– “I am Kingdom of Greycastle’s Fourth Prince, and Border Town Feudal Lord, Roland Wimbledon”

He then continued.

– “These are the members of the Witch Union, you... Do you remember anything?”

Witch Union?

She frowned.

Are they witches? Although I don’t know if this is a new organization, but at least they are the same as m... Why do they look like they are this man’s subordinates?

Wait a moment, Prince?

She then recalled for a moment, and couldn’t help to feel dumbfounded, is this not a term used more than 400 years ago, when the First War of Divine Will was taking place.

Wasn’t that a name commonly used among the political powers of the time? This is... Did I go back to the time before the war started? Did the gods gave me a chance to make preparations ahead of time in order to save the Holy City and its people?

No, I need to calm down.

She told herself that this nonsense of story would only happen in some tavern. In the end did they finally came to rescue her? In the basement of the experimental building, a group of Devil rushed in, she released all the magic in her body in order to build the most solid ice barrier. The Echo magic stone should have kept sending the distress signal, waiting for the day they returned to the fertile plains and find her trapped there.

– “Did you save me?”

That’s right, that’s the only explanation, I was no longer inside the barrier because the witch army came back!

– “Did the Devil retreated? Did we win? The Holy City... What happened to the Holy City of Taqila?”

After she blurted out this series of questions, she saw a change in the face of several people, they were looking at each other, revealing an expression of joy and excitement. A more mature witch came, with long red hair, and said.

– “We indeed found you in the basement of a stone tower, are you a person from 450 years ago?”

This witch reminded her of that Holy Warrior who turned the tide of the battle, she had the same red hair, as a flame to inspire people.

Compared to the gray-haired man, she was more than happy to answer the witch's questions, even though she usually would not be so fussy about whether their status was low or high, being inquired by such inferior person made her feel offended.

If she were to complain to his master about this questioning, the man most likely would be severely punished.

– “My name is Agatha, I'm a member of the Taqila Exploration Society.”

She paused for a moment.

– “What do you mean with 450 years ago? Does that mean... Have you been fighting with the Devil for more than 400 years? That's impossible.”

The man called Roland answered.

– “You've been sleeping for a long time, things might be a bit different from what you remember. If your body feel better maybe we can slowly fill you in.”

– “Speak.”

Agatha closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Although this “Prince” behaved very rudely, she had no time to worry about such

matters.

As the other party began to elaborate on the history of Greycastle, and the evolution of the Four Great Kingdoms of the mainland, she felt cold sweat gradually emerging from her back.

In his narration, Agatha soon found several familiar signs, such as the Concealing Forest, or the Impassable Mountain Range... adding this to her memories, the conclusions she obtained shocked her.

If the names of those places were the same as she remembered, the so called Four Kingdoms were nothing but the long strip of land between the mountains and the ocean, a barren place that had no real development value in her opinion.

And the wild forbidden area he spoke of, was unexpectedly her very familiar fertile plains. As for the Stone Tower, and the Holy City of Taqila, along the years they have become unknown, buried areas.

How can this be so ridiculous?

But something even more laughable was coming.

Buried along with Taqila, was also the status the witches held in the past, in this era, the witches had become objects of repulsion, and all along the Four Kingdoms, the regime was held firmly by common people, calling themselves Kings and Nobility, same as it

had happened in those outdated times before the First War of Divine Will.

But, for those old-fashioned people, to become rulers above the witches.

How was that possible?

She couldn't bear to remain silent and interrupted.

– “Preposterous! The witches are hunted and killed by ordinary people? Who dared to do such a thing?”

Angry, Agatha grabbed the man in front in order to teach him a lesson for talking about this nonsense, but she was unable to use her magic, the cold frost didn't gush out like in the past.

At this moment, she felt some kind of metal ring on her ankle, and after lifting her quilt a little, she saw it had a God Punishment Stone in it.

She couldn't believe the witches in front of her.

– “Are you crazy!? Not only you have helped an ordinary man instead of a High Ranked Awakened, but also violated the Federation ban, using God Punishment Stones unauthorized!”

Only the Federation's Law Enforcement Squads were allowed to

use the God's Stone, in addition, any person who carried, sold, transformed or destroyed a stone would be subject to the severest of sanctions, possibly even the death penalty.

The Prince let out a sigh.

– “I was worried about this.”

– “Don't worry, I'll talk to her”

The red-haired witch sat down on the bedside and covered her with the quilt again

– “My name is Wendy, the things are not what you think, also, the matters he spoke of are true... I don't know how it was in the Holy City 450 years ago, but right now, Taqila has ceased to exist, and I have never heard of this Federation you talk about, we all have been living our lives in hiding, until we met Your Highness Roland.”

“He has given us a safe place to live, and encourages us to use our abilities, and to study in order to make better use of our powers to change the world. Here, we can live normal, ordinary lives, without the need to hide, and without the fear of being hunted or killed by the church or the people. You should know that now the God's Punishment Stones are everywhere, and we witches are no more stronger than normal people if we lose our powers.”

After listening to Wendy's story, Agatha was completely silent.

The Federation was a large organization led by several witches from different kingdoms, among them were many High Ranked and Exceed. In order to win the War of Divine Will, they had to unite, and the Federation formed a huge army, but also, while managing various Holy Cities, they were responsible for training and dispatching witches, resolving disputes, maintaining the public order and stability. Only they had the power to catch and judge a witch... However, despite being such a powerful organization, nobody had heard of its reputation now...

Where were those escapees who wanted to rebuild the order?

Chapter 345 – Past (Part 2)

These huge changes made Agatha feel dazed, she did not want to believe the other party, but the story sounded very real, like if they had personally experienced it, a story so miserable, she had a hard time believing someone just made that up.

If she were to try it, she found it impossible to imagine being enslaved, hunted or killed.

Even in the Holy City, the common citizens were still considered people, not animals.

She felt extremely weary, Wendy seemed to notice her discomfort and brought her a cup of hot milk, “Drink this, it will make you feel better.”

Although this red-haired woman was not blessed by the gods, with power and strength to overwhelm all living beings, she still felt affected by her like a flame, not hot and dazzling, but warm like the cup... She drank the milk, as the sweet taste flowed into her stomach, she felt her strength restored a little.

After resting for a while, the conversation continued.

Even though she didn't know why a group of witches would be wary of one of their own kind, she wanted to believe in them, after all, to unlock the God Punishment Stone on her foot, they needed to trust each other first.

As for the credibility of what Wendy spoke about the Prince, she had to confirm it with her own eyes.

Before witnessing what this narrow stretch of barbaric lands was like, she wasn't ready to believe the Federation had vanished without a trace, like it never existed.

"Like I said before, my name is Agatha, a member of Taqila's Exploration Society. In the fifth year of the War of Divine Will, as the last Holy City left standing, Taqila could no longer hold and the war ended. Most of the people fled from the city, but I went to the Concealing Forest, to retrieve some things I left behind." the prince asked.

"Wait... Were you fighting against the Devil?"

Agatha frowned at that question, "Who would do it if not us? Would you rely on ordinary people like you?"

"Are you a witch of the Church?"

She impatiently said, "I don't know what the Church is, I have not heard about it before. Taqila... All of the Holy Cities were built by witches, and there were tens of thousands of people living in them, apart from witches, most of them were people like you. They were responsible for giving birth and taking care of children until they awakened as a witch, after that, the new witches were given a specialized education training. Naturally, if a witch was deemed good at fighting, she would incorporate to the Federation,

and join the battle against the Devil.”

The Prince pondered for a moment, then took out a book and handed it to her, “Can you understand what’s written here?”

Agatha casually turned a couple pages, and was quickly drawn to it, “This... is a witch’s diary.”

A witch with light grey hair then asked, “You know this language?”

“The Federation created it, so that the common people would not be able to decipher it, but since they were unable to participate in the upper-class decisions anyway, I always thought this wasn’t a great idea.”

The witch asked with curiosity, “How? If it’s just another set of letters, couldn’t the average person grasp it with enough study?”

Agatha then proceeded to explain, “You need to use magic power to read it, it’s not so difficult, if you’re a witch, I can teach you.”

“The text itself is a tool of communication, making it more widespread is always better, indeed it’s really stupid. Excluding the ordinary people greatly reduces the manpower available. In fact, after training and education, ordinary people can be qualified for a variety of jobs, and with the exception of magic ones, they will not be bad at them.” The prince commented.

Even if she shared his ideas, about questioning the Federation's policies whether to accept the collaboration of ordinary people with no magical powers or not, she still didn't like how he tended to stand in front of everyone.

She began to miss Kraft.

Even a family bodyguard, understood more about politeness compared with this so-called Prince.

Another witch came forward to ask, judging by her looks, she seemed to be of considerable age, "My name is Scroll, Miss Agatha. Have you heard the name Akaris?"

Agatha was slightly surprised by this question, "Where did you hear that name? Didn't you say the matters about 450 years ago were lost?"

Scroll responded, "I once found an old book among some ruins, in the forest of the eastern region of Greycastle, that's the same book you are currently holding, the name appears on the last page, and it's written in the language of the average person."

Agatha turned to the last page hastily, and read through the several lines of scribbled notes, she let out a deep sigh, and remained silent for a long time.

In her mind, the image of the woman holding the sword, summoning thousands of rays of light, emerged. But this time, the

shadow seemed a lot bigger.

After some time passed, she slowly said, “Akaris, the Queen of the City of the Falling Star, one of the Federation Three High Seats. She was a rank above Exceed, a so-called Transcendent. Even among all the Federation’s Holy Warriors, she was the most powerful one.”

There was restlessness between the witches.

“Rank above... Exceed?”

Agatha sank into her seat, “Since all this is lost knowledge, it’s normal that you do not know, the abilities of each witch start growing from the day they awake to their witch powers and it solidifies in their coming-of-age day. But that’s not the peak of their abilities, through understanding, feelings and practice, some of the lucky ones can go a step further, enhancing their abilities incredibly... We call them High Rank, or Awakened. There is no upper limit to this awakening and the increase is not limited to the branching of their powers, but also can be observed in the shape of their magical power.”

The prince touches the back of his head as he said, “Well, if it’s about evolving, the Witch Union has four witches who had evolved their abilities.”

This comment made Agatha almost choke, “What? Four? How many members does the Witch Union have?”

The Prince starts using his fingers and after finishing said, “A little over 10 people.”

She seemed a little annoyed by his response, “Don’t talk nonsense about things you don’t know! Four witches among a little over 10, awakening and becoming High Ranked? You obviously have no idea what awakening means, don’t place it on the same level of the coming-of-age magical solidification or branching of abilities, those are completely different! In order to become a High Rank, one not only needs to be loved by the gods, but also hard work and effort are indispensable!”

The Prince, feeling somewhat helpless, beckoned, “Anna.”

A beautiful and calm girl, as Agatha observed the witch walk to her bedside, she gave her honest evaluation. Even for a witch, such appearance was very outstanding, blue eyes like a crystal-clear lake reflecting the moon, enough to see her own reflection.

However, she was too young, perhaps barely an adult, and that made it obvious she had no experience training, feeling or understanding magic. To her, that had her awakening at the age of 26 years old, and was considered as an outstanding talent by the Federation, it was clear how difficult it was to gather experience.

Agatha thought, probably they treat the branching abilities of the coming-of-age period as awakening to a higher rank.

A flame with orange light appeared in Anna’s hand.

She quickly gave her evaluation, “Flame-class ability, a very common Summoning type, which can be measured by the maximum temperature and heating speed, she can be regarded as a combat witch.”

As she finished her words, the flames suddenly dimmed, turning into a small wisp, slowly changing its colors, ranging from dark green to an aqua tone, and filling the surroundings with its own rays of light.

The prince answered, “This is the solidification of her coming-of age, and next is the key point.”

Solidification? No... How can this be solidification? Mature witches are supposed to make their flames hotter, brighter and bigger, she was astonished. Moreover, what was this key point?

Soon, Agatha saw the unthinkable, the green fire disappeared and was replaced by a black block, it didn't resemble a flame at all, more like a metal box, without any light, its walls were smooth, the corners with a distinctive sharp shape, calmly standing in the hand of the witch.

Chapter 346 – Past (part 3)

“Well... is this a high rank awakening?” The prince asked.

Agatha did not know what to say, in her brain, the only thought was, how is this happening?

The Holy City was forgotten, the Federation was destroyed, it would not be wrong to say that under no specific training and guidance, a witch's ability should have suffered greatly and be lower than in the past. But then, what was this in front of her eyes? A barely adult witch has had its ability evolved twice, this was not something that could be attributed to good luck, even in the prolific Federation, witches like her were only a few.

Moreover, if their words were true, were there at least other three people like Anna?

Agatha stared at the grey-haired man, and after a while she turned her gaze to the ceiling, “It... It should be, but I don't have an assessing magic stone, so I can't test the size of her ability.” She paused, feeling her throat a little dry, “I would like to ask, what did Anna experience, that caused her to awaken? She looks very young so I think she just reached adulthood recently, and these two changes seem to have taken place in a short span of time, maybe a year or two?”

Agatha said, discovering that she, unknowingly had started to use polite language.

Even if a large number of people would mate, it was not guaranteed that a powerful witch would be birthed, so it was the experience, rather than the origin, what determined their ability, in order to join the higher ranks. And accordingly with Anna's ability, she had already qualified to join the top ranks of the Federation, comparing her to herself, even if Anna had not acquired a higher authority, she would at least be treated as an equal figure.

Any witch who had awoken to become a High Rank, was deemed worthy of respect.

“The first time, it was because of magic exhaustion after fighting demonic beasts, the second time, I think it was due to the new knowledge I learned.”

“Knowledge...” She was startled, “What knowledge?”

Cough, cough, “We can continue that discussion later,” the prince cleared his throat, “for now let's get back to the topic we were talking about, what is this experiment of Akaris, this God Punishment Army referring to?”

If they were not telling lies, this knowledge contained certainly an extraordinary truth, big enough so that it could give Anna an epiphany to awaken new abilities. Right now, he was not willing to cooperate and that was perfectly normal since trust had not been established yet. Agatha couldn't help feeling excited, if she could improve the chances of a witch awakening, that was of extraordinary significance, and if she could find the principle, the revival of the federation was not impossible.

However, where did he get this knowledge? In this backwards barbarian land, how could some villagers understand the secret of magic? She was filled with confusion, in these more than 400 years, what had the world turned into?

Agatha put these difficult problems aside for the time being, “Akaris was extremely powerful, so after wearing a God Punishment Stone, even while facing several Lords of Hell, she was victorious. But, Transcendents were just too few in numbers, or should I say... were lost in, among the myriad of abilities.”

“Myriad?”

“Yes, a witch doesn’t know what she could do before the awakening to her powers, but according to the Federation statistics, only one in ten, 10% of the witches were suited for combat, the same went for the Exceed types. And among this 10%, how many can advance their powers to a higher rank was completely up to fate. The Federation has had times where no witch advancing her rank had appeared for 50 years, so the ability to fight depending solely on witches was very precarious.”

“The common people could not fight, the awakened witches were not always combat types, and those fighting were not necessarily strong, this kind of meaning?” The Prince was touching his chin as he spoke.

“That’s pretty much it,” Agatha let out a sigh, “so we formed a guard comprised of mortals to make up for the witch’s

insufficiency, but... mortals cannot defeat the Devils. Even if they were to carry God Punishment Stones, they would still be far behind and unable to fight against the strength of the mighty demons. So Akaris, in this unfavorable situation, ordered the Exploration Society to embark in a journey to break the limits of the human body in order to create a superior warrior, and looking at these scribbled, almost illegible notes, she seemed to have succeeded...”

“Seemed to? Were you not also a member of the Exploration Society?” The Prince asked curiously.

“That’s correct, but when the order was issued, I left the Tower, and built my own experimental building in the Concealing Forest,” she bit her lip, hesitating for a moment, “but they quickly found their way around, using the power of the God Punishment Stone to force a witch and a mortal to bind together, but... this process consumed the witch’s life. I couldn’t accept the way the experiments were going, the Exploration Society should focus on exploring ways to use magic and the Punishment stones, instead of seeing the witches as expendable. Natalia was right, this kind of behavior would eventually bring destruction to the witches.”

“They treated people as consumables?” the prince seemed a little socked.

“Akaris was against the wall at that time, Taqila was on the verge of collapse,” seeing Roland’s pained expression made Agatha’s heart feel a little warmer, “but now the Federation had vanished, obviously these kinds of practices were not preserved, so it should never happen again.”

After she said that she lowered her head, stroking gently that page, Over the mountains, Across the river... what a familiar slogan. But where are you now? How can I rebuild the order alone?

“But the God Punishment Army still exists.”

This remark made Agatha’s fingers turn stiff, and she looked at the prince with disbelief, “You... What did you say?”

“I do not know whether this is a coincidence or not,” he slowly spoke, as if thinking every word carefully, “the Church... that organization you’ve never heard about, has established two cities in the big open land at the center of the Impassable Mountain Range, they are known as “Holy Cities”. The hunt of witches was initiated by them, and not only that, they are still searching for orphans and homeless children and bringing them back to their monasteries to adopt them, Wendy escaped from one of them.

“The Church has its own army and territory, the most powerful warriors they have are the God Punishment Army, they are mindless monsters of infinite strength and endurance, only comparable to the Exceed. In addition, they probably even have several powerful witches, which is why I used the God Punishment Stone to temporarily seal up your ability.” The prince relaxed his hands, “Before you told us about this, we had always thought that along with the establishment of the Holy City of Taqila, it was the people of the Church the ones fighting against the Devil, and that those ruins were also left behind by them.”

Agatha opened her mouth, but no words came out, an organization composed basically by mortals, had gotten hold of the Federation's most important secret, and in return went on to hunt the witches, and made their own God Punishment Army to consolidate their own rule? She suddenly felt a splitting headache, the God Punishment Army did not die out, but instead fell into the hands of an organization hostile towards witches! What the hell have the people of the Federation done?

Seeing her exhausted and uneasy expression, Wendy gently pushed her head on the bed and whispered.

“Today is your first day here, you should sleep. Rest assured, we will get to the root of the problem.”

Afterwards, she felt the lock on her ankle loose, Anna removed the God Punishment Stone. As the people in the room started to leave, the grey-haired Prince was the last one.

As he closed the door, Agatha heard his calm and steady words.

“There was one thing you were wrong about, mortals can defeat the devil.”

Chapter 347 – Doubts

– “How is she?” Roland lied down the pen, and looked at Nightingale quietly appearing in the office.

– “She has fallen asleep after eating a bowl of porridge, her appetite seems to be good.” Nightingale went to the desk and sat on her usual position before continuing. – “Right now, Sylvie is watching her.”

– “Well, that’s good.”

– “Do you believe her story?” Nightingale asked him.

– “In any case, the God Punishment Stone was removed, when we ask again tomorrow, you can tell whether she is lying or not, but...” Roland paused for a moment. – “I think most of what she said is true.”

– “Why?” She was curious about his answer.

– “What would you do if you were to find a man from 400 years ago, using the same language?” The Prince supported his chin with his hands. – “In fact, the two areas, were only separated by the Impassable Mountain Range, her story would be impossible unless both sides shared the same origin, additionally both are very close.”

– “But she called the Four Great Kingdoms, the Savage Lands”

– “That’s the main point... I don’t know what it was like more than 400 years ago, it may just have been a few villages and some criminals who have been banished to this region by the witch society. The Kingdom’s history books also record that the age every major city was established was generally between 200 and 300 years ago, moreover, the astrologers also appeared around that time.” He was full of spirits as he continued. – “I have always wondered why astrologers, who have no real achievements nor research, are also called “Sages” along with alchemists, now I understand, probably the Federation led the remaining survivors, fleeing into these lands adjacent to them, bringing their language and civilization along. These people blended in with the locals and helped them build a government system, strongholds and cities.”

– “It’s like if you have already seen something similar.” Nightingale smiled as she shook her head.

– “This is the only way to explain why we both speak the same language, because we share a common origin. Also, over the past 400 years, civilization has been rebuilding itself, without any kind of development.” Roland earnestly said.

– “Well. Tomorrow we’ll know the answer, if you guessed wrong... You’ll have to give me one “Luxury lunch”.” Said Nightingale as she extended her hand.

The so-called luxury lunch, was in fact, a set of corn chowder soup, grilled chicken and ice cream sandwich, available only once a week in the kitchen.

– “And what if your guess is wrong?”

– “You can ask for anything you want.” Nightingale tilted her head narrowing her eyes.

Her bright cheeks and perfectly curved and smooth neck, were exceptionally eye catching. In his mind, he gave her “full marks”, no matter what action she took, her movements were extremely alluring, Roland now finally verified how accurate this sentence was.

– “I need to finish this.” He cleared his throat and shifted his attention back to the documents.

Because Agatha had just wake up, Roland tried not to force each other with accurate and meticulous questions, and basically let her follow her train of thought, just asking when he wanted to ask something specific, so the information he received was somewhat confusing. What he was currently doing was, rearranging the new information Agatha had provided, trying to find out key points.

Without a doubt, the most urgent problem was the Devil.

Why did the war with the Devil began? and why were they being so quiet now? these reasons were information of vital importance for Border Town. There has never been a war without a motive, but the Devil’s actions were not like those of invaders, seizing resources and expanding; they had not occupied this so-called Savage Lands, nor had they enslaved humanity, it seemed more like just a mere slaughter.

Roland also noted Agatha mentioning the words “War of Divine Will”, were both sides incited by the gods to start a life and death war? But the Church had not existed at that time, and naturally they claimed to have only one deity, but none of this had been explained to him, so he could not feel at ease.

At the same time, he needed to find out as soon as possible about the Holy City civilization, their food, clothing, housing, transportation and all of their economic basis, since these details could help him measure the level of development of the civilization at the time, and indirectly determine the strength of the Devil.

As for the Federation itself, Roland was not too concerned. The scarcity of witches caused instability and the lack of combat potential doomed the organization. In the experience brought by history, it has been repeatedly emphasized that in the absence of a generational gap, a full-scale war brings about consumption, and even sophisticated weaponry does not restore the overall disadvantages.

The second point of concern were the magic stones.

According to Tilly, the magical properties of this type of stone, could cover up the weaknesses of an ability, allowing the witches display a power beyond their own, enabling even support type witches to even join in the battlefield, but that in Roland’s eyes, was putting the cart before the horse, even he treated the combat witches as support types, having them join the endless production projects.

However, what was strange was the Federation, they didn't try to have the witches fight this way, but instead, created the God Punishment Army, this was something really unexpected. Did the magic stones had some unknown flaw? Or were they extremely difficult to produce?

Fortunately, Agatha was a member of the Exploration Society, an organization similar to the current Alchemic Workshop, a gathering of highly gifted witches, specialized in the study and research of magic stones and magical power. Roland vaguely felt that there should be a lot of potential to uncover.

The final question was the Church.

He circled this name in the paper, the establishment and development of this organization clearly could not be answered by Agatha. It was only possible to infer: The Church was established after the defeat of the witches, by those who obtained the secrets of the Federation, and they hid away everything related to the witches, rendering them into the embodiment of the devil. If the people of the Four Great Kingdoms were seen as the descendants of the native people, then the Church would be without doubt an outsider, if the indigenous people themselves had no big civilization, it was no surprise they were able to make a fabricated story and add oracles to it.

All of this, just because the witches had once stood above the ordinary people, so all those refugees who escaped, had regarded the witches as their enemy, and had hunted them down all over the mainland?

Roland frowned, it sounded reasonable, but... it felt like if something was missing.

The Federation had many Holy Warriors and Exceed, even Transcendent... even if the people had God Punishment Stones, how could they possibly even be a match to such opponents?

It is clear that there is a lack of key information, if one wanted to erase a force that was way stronger than oneself, there is no way it could be done just by hated itself.

– “That witch doesn’t seem to like you very much.” Nightingale suddenly said.

– “After all, she was a witch living at a time they were at the top of the world, in her eyes, I’m afraid I’m no different from some weed at the side of the road.” Roland laughed.

– “Don’t you hate her?”

– “Why? She’s just a poor soul left behind by the times.” Roland shook his head. – “She slept in that ice coffin for more than 400 years, only to wake up to a world completely different, the fear of this strange situation will certainly bring her to build a wall to defend herself, by the time she starts to accept this reality, she should slowly change her mind.”

– “That’s like an answer you would give.” Nightingale said as she smiled. – “Don’t worry, I won’t allow her to harm you.”

Chapter 348 – Mortals And Peculiarity

When Agatha woke up again, there was nobody left in the room, the thick window curtains were closed, and everything seemed exceptionally quiet.

Probably considering that she was not in a familiar environment, near the side of the bed a candle had been lit, its orange flame was quietly burning.

She looked at it for a long time, and found that no wax had been dripping, the candle was still long, like it will burn forever.

This should be caused by magic, she believed.

The fabric of the quilt is very soft, probably woven with good cotton, making the inside very warm and light. This kind of treatment should not be below of that given in Taquila, it was very hard to believe that these savage lands could have such comfortable bedrooms.

As she moved her fingers, she noticed she had recovered most of her strength. Agatha stood up from the bed, and after circulating her magic power, the cold air started to overflow from her fingers, it seemed like the Prince really did not play any tricks on her, and properly removed the God Punishment Stone, noticing that, this gave her a sense of freedom to a certain extent.

She went to the window and opened the curtains. Outside was dark, there were no stars, nor she could see the moon, the whole

earth seemed to be swallowed by darkness, only at a distance she could see several places being illuminated by a shaky firelight. Through the window, she could hear the howling of the wind outside, and the occasional snowflake falling gently on the glass.

It appeared to be winter, the perfect season for a witch to awaken to her powers. Back in Taqila, there were no nights like this, during winter every day was a day of celebration. The streets were lit up by bonfires which remained up all night, and when she observed the view from her tower, the whole city appeared illuminated. The bright bonfires were like the stars, symbolizing hope and the future. The people gathered to pray around the fires, eager to obtain the power of magic and transcend the mortal realms. Whenever a witch appeared, the fate of her family also changed, they no longer needed to worry about food or clothing.

Agatha pulled the latch, opening the window towards her, immediately the cold wind rushed inside, blowing on the curtains and raising them. The candles inside were also extinguished. Darkness poured in, filling every corner of the room. When her eyes adapted to the darkness, she could see the faint white reflection of the snow on the roofs in the town. Judging from number of buildings, this place was really small, and the name “Border Town” she heard from the mouth of the Prince, was indeed fitting.

In such cold weather, the average person will be frozen after spending a few hours outside, but Agatha was not afraid of the cold, so the slight discomfort of the chill was naturally omitted by her body. She did not remember how the cold felt like before she awakened to her powers.

Closing her eyes, Agatha recalled the earlier conversations.

The Federation died out, the witches went to be known as the Devil's pawns, the mortals rely on the God Punishment Stone to hunt and kill the witches... From all that, even if Akaris and Natalia successfully fled from the fertile plains, maybe even they wouldn't be able to stop all this from happening, the demise of the Federation was already set in stone.

Just what exactly happened, that made these two Transcendent be defeated by the hands of mortals?

She simply refused to go on with that thought.

– “Aren't you cold?” Someone suddenly asked.

Agatha was startled, as she turned back, she noticed under the veil of darkness, the figure of a woman sitting by her bed, her face completely hidden in the night, as if she were just a quiet spirit. The door was still closed shut, and no footsteps were heard before.

– “If you could close the window, I wouldn't mind lighting the candle again.” She added.

She was without a doubt a witch.

But, what is she doing here so late?

Agatha calmly nodded, closing the casement, and quietly started letting a thin layer of ice flow little by little on her own skin. But the other person did not take any threatening action, and instead opened the first drawer of the nightstand, taking out a flint and steel, and lighting the candle with it. She saw the appearance of the witch: beautiful blond curled hair, slender eyebrows, a gaze very sharp, different from any witch she had seen before.

– “This is our first meeting... no, this would be our second meeting.” The corners of her mouth turned upwards. – “My name is Nightingale.”

This meant... she was hiding in the crowd before? – “Is this your ability?” Agatha frowned. – “Are you also a High Rank awakened witch?”

Even if she was an honorable High Rank witch, it was very disrespectful trespassing without even a greeting.

– “Ah, you refer to the evolution...” Nightingale shook her head – “I’m not so clever like Anna, who completed in a short time the «Theoretical Foundations of Natural Something», when I see those formulas and theorems, I feel like my head will explode. I will probably never experience the evolution of abilities in my whole life.”

In her short answer, she did not understand half the words, Agatha gawked, she did not expect such words to come out of the mouth of this “low ranked witch”, and by looking at her expression, it wasn’t like she was deliberately teasing her. Was this what the prince talked about... the knowledge?

- “That foundations of natural... could you show it to me?”
- “If course, as long as you are willing to join the Witch Union and work for the Prince” She shrugged.
- “You want me to serve a mortal?” Agatha’s eyes went wide open and after a while she quietly spoke – “I believed myself to be pretty weird, but did not expect you to be crazier than me.”
- “Weird? Crazy? Why do you say that?” Nightingale tilted her head.
- “In the Holy City of Taqila, most of the witches only treat ordinary people who cannot use magic as humble servants, inferiors, or... just tools to give birth. But I didn’t think like that, although some are stupid, they are not hopeless, as long as you teach them to think and learn, these people can perform no worse than witches. Because of this view, many people thought of my natural disposition to use mortals, and have them manage some of the tower’s affairs, as strange. That’s why I did not expect you to be stranger than me, going as far as to recognize a mortal as the main focus, serving under him.” Said Agatha.
- “Prince Roland does not regard us as servants.” Nightingale said as she curls her lips – “I’m not sure what strange misunderstanding of the word serve you have, but the truth is, he sheltered us witches away from the oppression of the Church, gave our sisters now strength, and allowed us and the citizens to live together in this western land, all while resisting the Church and the demonic

beasts, and in the future, also resisting the Devil together.”

– “But this pattern has already been proved to be a failure!” Agatha raised her voice a bit – “Over 400 years ago... for you it would be 8... 9... 800 years ago, that was an era where the mortals and witches ruled together, at that time humanity was at the peak of prosperity, however, after facing the attacks of the Devils, the result was a crushing defeat, only leaving a small corner, the fertile plains.”

– “Oh, and this is a problem?” She raised her brow.

– “You say this as if it’s buried history that ended over 450 years ago. According to the records of the federation, the Third War of Divine Will, will soon begin, and you know nothing about the Devil! At the east is the Vortex Sea, where would you retreat? If the Federation is rebuilt, the witches unite, and make use of that knowledge to improve the chances of a high rank awakening, only then, we will be able to have a chance at stopping the Devil’s attacks!”

– “Why do you believe that?”

– “What?”

– “It’s been more than 400 years now, isn’t it? 400 years can change a lot of things, why do you still cling to that old concept, refusing to let it go?” Nightingale sighed. – “You heard the words of His Highness as he left, mortals can defeat the Devil. He is also working hard to unite the people, not only the witches, he wants to

unite all the people in the mainland, he has told me, creating the most powerful community.”

“Savage lands” Agatha just wanted to refute this nonsense, but suddenly paused. The witch in front of her must have already seen the result. Can 400 years really change all this? Did this grey-haired prince’s abilities were unexpectedly high as to let mortals have the same power of a witch?

– “Seems you have already realized it, we still have a lot of time, so why don’t you break this shell you made, and confirm it with you own eyes?” Nightingale said with a smile.

Agatha was silent for a long time. – “...I can see that you don’t like me.”

There was no rebuttal from the other side.

– “The witches of the Exploration Society were always looking at me the same way, since I had mortals appointed as testing assistants in the tower.” She continued. – “You obviously don’t like me, why do you tell me these things?”

– “As long as you restrain that arrogance of yours, and treat the Prince normally, I don’t have much reasons to dislike you, as for the latter...” She paused. – “it’s because His Highness said he didn’t want to see you being left behind by time.”

Chapter 349 – Inheritance (First Half)

Mayne stood at the top of the Tower of Babel, looking through the windows towards the snow-wrapped city of Hermes.

It's been a while since the last large group of demonic beasts attacked the Holy City, the snow falling in the fields had time to settle down again, and the snowstorm had also weakened a lot. The residents of the city had welcomed this rare leisure.

These days should be a time to celebrate, but Mayne's heart felt a little empty. In order to kill the monstrous giant hybrid species of demonic beasts, a team of God Punishment Army's warriors went out of the walls and confronted these demonic beasts. In the end, 19 of those warriors were wounded and two had been killed. After the two beasts had their limbs cut off, they had been lying on the ground for a long time, and the guards at the wall had killed them with their thrown spears. However, compared to the losses of the God Punishment Army, what terrified Mayne was the magnitude of this attack of demonic beasts in a short time frame.

After being silent for a long while, he let out a heavy sigh trying to vent out his anger, and returned to his sit at the table, he opened the Holy Scripture, immersing himself in it again.

“Even if you turn it upside down, the contents will not change. Hasn't His Excellency O'Brien agreed to see you yet?” Tayfun carried two cups of hot drinks into the circular hall, and placed one cup in front of Mayne.

“This is the third time I’ve made a request to enter the Cardinal Secret Area, but they still have not responded... I don’t know what His Excellency is busy with, at this critical moment.” Mayne said anxiously.

“Do not worry,” Tayfun interrupted him “you said it yourself, the Holy Scripture was written by the First Pope, so it’s unavoidable that it has some mistakes, after all, over 400 years have passed, who can guarantee that everything in it is accurate?”

“But this is different.” the Archbishop shook his head “If the date is interpreted wrong, it will be a catastrophe for us! We have already invested a great amount of power and energy for the unification of the Kingdoms, so that the strength of all the mainland can resist the Devil, but if the time left is shortened by half, we have no way to accumulate that many warriors of the God Punishment Army after these battles!”

“Quiet Sir Mayne.” The old Bishop smiled, and slowly drank the hot drink “It’s already happened, the fangs of hell appeared before us, no one can change that fact. But perhaps this was because of two reasons.”

“What reasons?”

“Take a sip with me first.” Tayfun said, while stroking his beard.

Mayne carried the cup closer, it seems like a cup of goat’s milk, but on closer inspection, it actually has a sweet fragrance to the nose “What’s in it?”

“Winter’s bloom.” Tayfun slightly smiled “Although drinking Dream Water directly is bad, doing it like this is acceptable, it can at least help you ease the tension, and soothe the nerves to help you sleep.”

Mayne took a mouthful of the goat’s milk, feeling a burning sensation transmitting down his throat, although the goat’s milk diluted with some winter’s bloom was mellow, it’s a drink he would never be able to get used to. After coughing twice, he wiped his mouth “Even if it’s a whole glass of Dream Water, at this moment I doubt it will allow me to fall asleep, will you speak now?”

“One possibility is that the Pope made a mistake. Regarding old people, they will often be light-headed, and as their memories fade, they will interpret them wrong, of this I have deep understanding.” Tayfun shrugged.

“It’s highly unlikely,” Mayne knitted his eyebrows while saying “this is related to the layout and structure of the church, and even a deciding factor of the fate of mankind, he must have been very careful while writing these things. What about the second possibility?”

“The second scenario, due to some unknown circumstance, has caused the situation to change.”

The Archbishop waited for a moment, and saw that the other had not continued to speak, so he wondered. “Such as?”

“That’s it.”

“That’s it... What kind of joke is that? The situation has changed? Because of such a reason, all of our efforts are for nothing!? How can you be so irresponsible!?”

“Sir Mayne!” Tayfun voice suddenly was raised a few degrees “What are you demanding, a certain way to defeat the Devil? Do you really believe that by defending Hermes, the Devils will halt their advance?”

“...” Mayne was startled.

“Everyone wants to win every fight, but so far, even against the Four Kingdoms, we had not won each and every battle, and that’s not mentioning the Devils from Hell!” He exclaimed loudly “Did you forget the teaching of His Excellency the Pope? Excessive effort and fear of the results is not much different. What you should do is accept that fact that step by step the closure is drawing near, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Fear... of the results. The heart of Mayne felt a shock, it was exactly as he said, he had fear; He was afraid of becoming the Pope, not being able to stop the Devil, and ultimately letting mankind fall to ruin by his own hands.

“I used to be like you.” Tayfun voice suddenly calmed down “But Heather’s death showed me that the results are, in many cases, unpredictable. The Months of Demons came too soon without

warning, but we still tried to take Wolf Heart City, so the plans remained the same... But Heather died, and the tide of the war changed. But even so, we must still go on.” He got up and let out a sigh, after he patted Mayne on the shoulder, he walked towards outside the hall. “Even so... whether it’s five years, or ten years, you have to be steadfast in the end, not to find a way to win, but because it’s your duty, even if the result is contrary to what’s expected.”

The hall door closed, and Mayne was left looking at his empty cup, unable to utter a single word.

He had to admit that Tayfun had a point, but how could he not be afraid when he had to shoulder such a big responsibility.

Suddenly, a judge came in.

“Sir Mayne, His Excellency the Pope wants to see you.”

At last!

He immediately stood up, eagerly.

“Take me to the Cardinal Secret Area.”



The Cardinal Secret Area, deeply hidden in the underground of

the plateau, was just as before, cold and silent.

As he walked into the Cardinal Secret Temple's main hall, Mayne was startled slightly, today it was not arranged like when the transformation ceremony took place, all the candles in the hall were lit, the dense and numerous flames gave an orange outline to the hall. The chandeliers hanging from the ceiling were like the kingdom of God, bringing together all the stars.

His Excellency O'Brien sat on the throne, calmly looking at him.

Mayne felt something strange with this atmosphere, but suppressed his doubts back to a corner of his heart, before arriving to the throne, he knelt down with both hands touching the floor, his forehead slightly kissing the ground.

"Get up, child." The Pope's voice was very faint, it was hard to hear unless he concentrated on it.

Mayne straightened up his body, and saw the Pope's weary and tired expression on his face, as if he had not rested for a long time. "Your Excellency, please pay attention to your body."

"That's of no use," He smiled, the deep wrinkles filled his cheeks immediately "I will die soon."

"Your Excellency, you will not..."

"No, listen to me, child."

O'Brien interrupted the words of the Archbishop strongly

"I know my own condition, and without a doubt, the time of my death is near."

He paused for a moment and took a deep breath.

"The purpose of today's call, is to have you inherit the position of Pope."

Chapter 350 – Inheritance (Second Half)

Mayne was stunned. He stared into the old man's eyes, trying to see what the other party meant.

However, he couldn't find what he was looking for.

His gaze was no longer profound as it had been in the past, able to thrust deep into his heart. He might have had the wisdom given by the successive Popes, gained knowledge from the ten thousand scriptures, but... He lacked time.

His Excellency was not joking, Mayne realized that his journey was indeed reaching its end.

His eyes were somewhat cloudy.

He knelt down again, with his forehead touching the ground, but this time His Excellency did not ask him to get up like before. After reaching that position, his voice called to him.

“Follow me.”

The guards taking care of the Pope carried him into some sort of cart and after placing him in it, started pushing him towards the door in front leading to the Cardinal Secret Area. Mayne immediately followed after them, leaving the Cardinal Temple as it turned into a long and narrow corridor. On the smooth wall, every ten steps or so an illumination crystal was embedded, at a glance

reaching until its end.

He did not know for how long he walked, but after a while Mayne left the corridor, and his vision suddenly brightened, turning the rough floor into one made of smooth, flat slate. He could see the angular walls, and on top, a chandelier hanging from the ceiling, apparently this secret passage was connected to a basement.

“We are in the old Holy City’s underground Cathedral,” watching the confusion in Mayne’s eyes, the Pope went ahead and said, “the structure here and the one above ground are exactly the same, but it’s built backwards, so I’m used to call it the Reflected Church.”

“Underground Cathedral? I have always thought the Cathedral had no basement.” Mayne exclaimed with a bit of surprise.

“Indeed, it does not have one, both are not interlinked,” O’Brien smiled, “the only way to get here is through the underground corridor from the Cardinal Secret Area. The roof is made of several layers of thick slate and a clay mix, which makes it generally impossible to chisel through.”

“Why... is it designed like this?”

“In order to keep the secret, but not bury it thoroughly. Every Pope, before taking the throne, must come to the Reflected Church, and witness the establishment, development, and expansion of the Church, while simultaneously keeping in mind its goal.”

“Defeat the Devils.” Mayne replied.

O’Brien did not nod in affirmation, but instead let out a slight sigh. “No child, it is to win the smile of God.”

The Archbishop froze. “What?”

The Pope did not answer him, and instead directed the guards to move on. Following the stairs and slope’s direction, they started to go upwardly. Before long, the group arrived at a grand, magnificent hall. Its structure was familiar to Mayne, judging by the surroundings, this should be the prayer room of the Reflected Church.

The thick wooden doors were slowly pushed open, producing a squeaking sound. Although it seemed like the Pope did not visit this hall frequently, it did not have the particular smell of dust... it was very neat, making it obvious that someone had always come to clean it.

“This is as far as they can take me, you have to take over and push the cart.” O’Brien said.

“Yes, Your Excellency.” Mayne took the handle, pushing the Pope into the prayer room, and then the wooden doors behind them were closed again, leaving the light of the torches behind. Now, the only illumination inside was the soft light emitted by the illumination stones, similar to the ones embedded at the sides of the corridor, but the difference lay in the huge portraits hanging over the stones. He vaguely remembered this location, in that

place should be the window openings of the above ground praying room.

The portraits were mostly similar with only minor differences. They were dressed in gorgeous robes, full of energy, and with bright eyes, like those of a god gazing at each visitor that entered the praying room. Mayne was surprised to see His Highness O'Brien staring at his own portrait, with a smile on his face. This strange feeling made him shiver and sent goosebumps to his back.

"Ah, you saw me." Sensing the change of the Archbishop's mood, the Pope said. "This picture was finished six months ago, when I was not as old as now, at least I wanted to look good. But it should have not been hung until after I died." He looked at it carefully, "I was too impatient at this point, I wanted to see what I looked like hanging up like this."

"Your Excellency, these are..." Mayne felt his throat becoming dry.

"Yes, they are the great pioneers, successively holding the title of Pope of the Holy Church." He said in a soft voice. "Go ahead, I will introduce you to the eleven of them."

The Archbishop listened to the brief description of His Excellency O'Brien, at the same time he was looking at the portraits. He knew these were the supreme leaders of the Church, but an inexplicable weird sensation remained in his heart. The characters in the paintings were so lifelike, he could not imagine what kind of technique the painter used to create such portraits. In addition, the yellow light was not so bright and only reached half way, the upper

half of these portraits were gradually fading into darkness, leaving only the faces grinning at him.

After passing half way through the hall, Mayne was surprised, noticing the characters in the portraits had become women.

They were all different in appearance, their attire was also not the same, but they all could be called beautiful, having little resemblance to the faces of common people. The Archbishop was not familiar with this, but this was the reason he felt extremely confused and surprised. But still, His Excellency O'Brien seemed to have no response and still, calmly introduced their names, their period in the past, and their merits.

These people were also the Popes of the Church.

The prayer room soon came to an end.

Right in the middle of the hall, a full body portrait occupied the entire wall surrounded by four illumination crystals, making the picture clearer.

Mayne swallowed a saliva, as he looked towards the person in the painting.

The moment his eyes finally fell on the picture, he suddenly felt his chest fiercely jumping. This was just a peerless woman; except for this word, it was difficult for him to find any other word or expressions to describe her. She had both the woman's sweetness

and the man's resoluteness, unusual conditions, both appearing as natural without any conflict. Her red hair was like a burning flame, in her hand she held a cold, bright sword. She leaned on the sword with her eyebrows slightly raised, both of her eyes looking straight ahead, the thin lips tightly closed, not showing the fury of power. Under the gaze of those eyes, Mayne felt a pressure capable of moving mountains, making him almost unable to bear kneeling down in front of the woman.

“Your Excellency, this is...”

As he turned his head with difficulty, he found that O'Brien had knelt down.

“She is the First Pope, the Transcendent, Akaris. She also had the nickname The Witch Queen.”

Mayne was startled, his previous guess was absolutely correct, the earlier Popes of the Church were witches!

“Why would the founder of the Church be a witch?”

“Kneel down to her child, later, I will show you what you want to know.”

Chapter 351 – Ghosts (First Half)

After Mayne finished this procedure, he helped the Pope back into the cart.

“Zero.” O’Brien gasped for air, saying in a low voice.

A Purified wearing white clothing came forth from a door at the side, with soft footsteps barely audible.

“I’m here.”

The Archbishop knitted his brows; he had not expected to find a Purified in such a secret place, although after they awakened to their powers, they were raised by the Pope, and served His Excellency the rest of their lives... these women were still witches. And the fact that they seem to have known the existence of the Inverted Church even ahead of himself, made him feel a little uncomfortable.

“Lead him to the illusions.”

“By your will.” She went to the praying altar, and held her hand down to the stone inscription. After a flash of magic, the giant painting slowly raised upwards, revealing a shiny, dark metal door. Afterwards, Zero removed the pendant hanging from the Pope’s neck, and inserted it into the lock mechanism. The inside made a clatter sound, and the iron door opened inwards.

She then took out the pendant, but instead of returning it to O'Brien, she placed it into Mayne's hands.

The Archbishop turned to look at the Pope, who nodded. "Take it, from now on it is yours. Whether it is the library of the Cardinal Temple, or the secret door to the research area, it can be opened with this crystal stone."

"Let's go." Zero pulled Mayne's hand with a small smile, and they started walking into the room past the giant painting. This place did not exist on the cathedral above ground; in this area there was only the view from the window, watching over the Hermes Plateau from a high altitude.

The room appeared to be very spacious, with a circular structure, almost half as big as the praying hall, which could accommodate dozens of people standing side by side, so it was very difficult to see it as a "secret room". However, there was nothing in this huge space, it looked very empty. The only place to sit was a stone bench, extending all along the curved wall.

After the metal door closed, Mayne shook off the hand of the Purified. "Why didn't His Excellency come in instead?"

Zero thought a little before responding. "If I didn't come in, who was going to start the Phantom stone? You can't use magic power."

Such a rude reply frustrated Mayne, it seemed like she was still a witch only in His Excellency O'Brien's service. When he receives the scepter and is officially in charge of the Church, he needed to

absolutely make her understand, respect needs to be shown not only to the Pope himself, but also to the Archbishop who has the qualifications to inherit the position.

“Then begin.” He said, while holding back his foul mood, and then sat down on the stone bench.

“Yes, my lord,” said Zero, lifting the dark plate on the wall, and pressing her hand into the magic stone, “but please be prepared, because this is also the first time I’ve started this thing.”

The first time? Didn’t she live for over 200 years, and was involved in the previous Pope’s inheritance ceremony? Mayne felt a little discomfort in his chest, but it was too late to ponder. A dazzling light flashed, after which he was surprised to find himself in the dark.

A darkness so pure, no light was visible; the walls, the floor, even the stone bench all seemed to have disappeared, as if the abyss had turned into a beast and swallowed everything, immediately losing the concept of far and near. The whole underground space was unified by this obscurity, and all the eye could see was only this deep blackness. He lowered his head, even his body was being drowned by it.

Mayne held his breath, cautiously reaching his hand down to touch it, the stone bench was still under him, and after stomping his feet, so was the floor, which made him feel slightly relaxed. It was not like he was transferred to a new underground floor, but it was the power of the magic stone that swallowed all the light in the place.

But in such a dark situation, how could he possibly see that which His Highness spoke of, the “truth”?

As if to answer his question, the ground once again was illuminated, but it was clear this was not the same scene as in the secret chamber; each slate was smooth and bright, engraved with intricate and exquisite patterns, reflecting a blue gloss. Soon, over his head the brightness arrived, and he was surprised to see a transparent roof on the ceiling with windows all over it, through which he could even see the clear sky and the clouds outside.

In a moment, many other furnishings appeared in succession: A marble round table, chairs encircling it, a map placed over the table along with glasses, the hanging curtains over the windows, a decorated sword and shield framed on the wall, as well as a giant horn hung atop the entrance.

Then, there were the figures of people.

Mayne did not dare to believe in such a vivid image, as women started appearing in his field of view, all of them wearing magnificent robes, sitting all around the round table, which was facing the door of the hall; in the seat of honor, with an intense red hair, was the Witch Queen. With her hands folded in front of her body, and her eyes looking straight ahead, the gazes all around were all focused on her, everyone looked the same as in the paintings he had seen earlier.

What does this illusion represent? Mayne thought, this scene was

so rich it was as if they were real, and suddenly all the people instantaneously came alive.

“Everyone, the experiment of the God Punishment Army has been successful,” a witch at the side of Akaris said, “the subjects are currently looking extremely fierce, and do not fear death, their power also seems infinite. With this, even a weak or support witch can be transformed into a mighty warrior not even inferior to unevolved Exceeds. In addition, they have a characteristic of disturbing the release of magic, so in the face of the wild demons and Lords of Hell who can use magic stones, the superiority will be without doubt enormous.”

“But the transformation ritual needs to consume the witch’s life, and I’ve heard that not everyone can successfully transform.” Someone said.

“This is only a trivial detail,” she opened out both of her arms, “and I believe that with the continuous research, the Exploration Society will certainly find a way to fix this.”

“Don’t say such words so easily Elaine, we are the minority, every witch is precious!” That person said as she frowned.

“What’s the difference between dying to the Devils’ hands and dying at the ritual?” Elaine raised her head to speak. “At least with the latter, they can make a final contribution to the Federation.”

“What did you say?”

“Enough.” Akaris said in a low tone, although her voice was very soft, the surroundings instantly quieted down, everyone closed their mouths, waiting for the Witch Queen’s words.

“The mortals are unable to defeat the Devils, my sisters,” she calmly continued, “we cannot do nothing. If we simply enjoy this momentary peace, and quietly wait for the Devils to invade us, history will repeat itself and completely erase us. But we can take a final stand, and put our hope in the God Punishment Warriors, while making sacrifices. I admit this is a difficult choice, but as long as humanity can continue, the lineage of the witches will never be cut off.”

“Although I am the queen of the City of the Falling Star, I would like to give you this important choice: abandon resistance and die peacefully, or avenge our fallen sisters, expelling the Devils out of the boundaries of the dawn, and revive the glory of the witches’ past.”

“Naturally, everyone present will not be able to participate in the Third War of Divine Will personally, therefore one choice is to just spend the rest of our days peacefully. But remember, the choice you make now is not just for yourself, but for all of the witch community... so that the future sisters can see the smile of God.”

“Those who do not agree with this, please stand up.”

Chapter 352 – Ghosts (Second Half)

Originally... this is what happened!

Mayne stared at the illusion, shocked.

The transformation ritual for the God Punishment Army was created by witches. In order to defeat the Devils, they were willing to sacrifice their own kind... How many people will stand up and admonish her for such ruthlessness?

The final result was beyond his expectation, and even after some minutes passed, nobody stood up; even the witch who questioned the ceremony, had not openly objected to Akaris' words, she just gritted her teeth and smashed her hand on the table. "It's really ironic! Killing witches in order to save more witches, is there a more ridiculous thing!?"

"But she is right," said an old witch, "we are born from mortals, and if mankind is destroyed, the witches will also perish."

"Conversely, no matter how many witches are sacrificed in the transformation ritual, there will always be new witches to replace them. More mortals, more witches." Elaine shrugged.

"Will the God Punishment Army be able to defeat the Devils?" Someone asked.

"That, I don't know," Akaris spoke once again, "No one knows

the answer before trying. The failure of the past two Wars of Divine Will have already showed us many problems. The power of the Devils is far greater than ours, and the red mist is the only restriction they have, keeping them from moving further, meaning that even if we create a large number of God Punishment Warriors, we might not even taste the final victory.” She paused. “But you should know my methods.”

“Even if there is only a small possibility, we must do everything we can.” Elaine said with a smile.

“I’m willing to follow you.”

“For the preservation of the witches.”

“I don’t want to admit defeat after all this.”

The witches stood up and saluted the Witch Queen.

The witch who raised the objections finally stood up and said, “I hope you are right.”

“Then, it is decided.” Akaris nodded not surprised by this result, “Now then, go and persuade the other members of the Federation.”

“They may not listen to you,” said the older witch, “if you want to carry the ritual of the God Punishment Army without resistance, witches cannot be privileged, the Federation must

dissolve, and everything that has happened in the past has to be completely buried.”

“I will spare no efforts trying to convince them.” Akaris said firmly, “If they cannot accept it, then the City of the Falling Star will push forward with the plan alone, and we will create a new order.”

Afterward the picture vanished... The darkness swallowed up everything again, and when the light in the secret chamber returned to normal, Mayne found his back soaked wet with sweat, and his mind felt dizzy.

“You seem a little tired, do you need me to help support you to the exit?” Zero came up and asked.

“I don’t need it, just go and open the door quickly!” He was breathing heavily.

After the metal door opened, Mayne stumbled out of the illusion room. Covering his mouth as he arrived at the praying altar, he kneeled down in front of O’Brien.

“When the magic stone starts, it will automatically map your mind, so it’s normal to feel unwell,” the Pope spoke in a soft voice, “The first time I came to that room I was the same as you, I was only able to recover after I got some rest.”

“Why doesn’t it affect me?” Zero hugged the Pope’s arm and

asked.

“Because you are a witch, your body has already adapted because of magic,” O’Brien gave a gentle smile, “whether is endurance or resistance, witches generally have more than most humans.”

After a while, Mayne regained his normal breathing. “Is this... the origin of the Church?”

“Yes, Akaris later led the City of the Fallen Star against the witches of two other cities in combat, and finally achieved victory, developing a new rule where witches were no longer privileged individuals chosen by god, but instead people lured and tempted by the Devil. That war lasted for nearly a century and was called the War of Faith in the history books.”

“Did she live that long?”

The Pope shook his head. “Shortly after the establishment of the Church, Akaris died, along with another Transcendent. The second Pope inherited her will, and continued to command the army to fight, until they subdued the other two factions, but this war severely damaged the three cities, making them almost unable to maintain a ruling system. Those who did not want to participate in the war of the witches began to take root in this narrow patch of land, leading the locals in their construction, and gradually forming the Four Great Kingdoms of today.”

For some reason, the more O’Brien spoke, the more energetic he became, and his voice more coherent, no longer having the weak

feeling from before.

“Although the Church repeatedly swept those remnants, including the humans not belonging to the City of the Falling Star, a secular pattern had already formed, causing the Church faith to become weak, therefore, failing to unify the mainland. All of this just because the Witch Queen died too early.”

“Natalia, who was regarded as her friend, not only did not accept her plan, but also suddenly attacked Akaris at the meeting, this was recorded in the complete Holy Scriptures.” The Pope let out a sigh. “If she were alive, the War of Faith would have ended in 50 years, after all of the witches had been taken in, allowing the Church to unify the mainland. Nobody would have thought this incident would drag us down even to the present.”

Mayne wiped off the sweat from his forehead, “Your Excellency, I still find something unclear, why were the first Popes witches, but all the other people after them were ordinary people?”

“Zero, you go back first.” O’Brien said after a moment of silence.

“Yes.”

After the Purified was gone, he slowly opened his mouth, “Because of cowardice and fearfulness.”

“What...?” He was startled, wondering if he had heard it wrong.

“No, child, you misunderstand.” O’Brien appeared to have seen through his thoughts with shining eyes, as if returning to a younger appearance. “In order to defeat the Devils, to regain the past glory of the witches, Akaris stipulated that the role of Pope must be held by an Exceed. But Exceed witches were very scarce, so later, outstanding ordinary witches served as the Pope, however, cowardice and fearfulness are like a serpent around your neck, once it grabs you, you can’t shake it off. The human Archbishop feared that someday, the oppressed witches would retaliate and directly usurped the position of Pope.”

Mayne stared with his eyes wide open, “So then, the later Popes were...”

“Yes, we are all cowards who stole the fruits of the witches’ sacrifice,” the Pope continued, “the Church will bury this secret, no matter what the future might bring.” He paused. “As for the truth of the War of Divine Will, it’s all recorded in the Cardinal Secret Temple, and now it’s to be shouldered all by you, as you move forward. Even if you decide to give up... that’s also a wise choice.”

After saying all this, his body suddenly relaxed, like a heavy burden had finally been lifted, as he let his body lie in the cart.

Give up? If I give up, who else would take over this seat? But Mayne didn’t have time to think about that, he found the condition of O’Brien deteriorating rapidly all of the sudden, as if his spirit was briefly growing dim, like when one was about to die, and looking at his eyes, the light in them was vanishing making them murky.

“Your Excellency, Your Excellency O’Brien!” Mayne moved forward and shook the opposite party anxiously, but he just had an empty look in his eyes, with his lips slowly opening and closing, as if trying to say something.

At the last moment, Mayne seemed to have heard the other side whispering.

“Child, I’m sorry.”

Chapter 353 – Exploration Society

As the night slowly faded, rays of light started to peek through the gaps of the window curtains.

Morning finally arrived.

Agatha had an almost sleepless night, her head was filled with Nightingale's previous words.

“Uniting the people spread across the mainland into a strong group.”

“400 years can change many things, why do you still cling to that old concept, refusing to let it go?”

“We still have a lot of time, so why don't you confirm it with your own eyes?”

After getting out of bed she arrived at the cloth rack, her hand felt the robes and stopped at the embroidered insignia symbolizing the Taqila Exploration Society. She remembered the time when she was awarded the robe by the Three High Seats, the happiness she felt at that moment was enough to make her fly. Exploring the mysteries of the world and pursuing the truth had always been her lifelong goal; it was what the Exploration Society believed in. What if that mortal could really prove the strength of his words?

She went outside the door after donning the robe, and then

walked down the hallway.

As perhaps the last member of the Exploration Society and as Taqila's only survivor, she wanted to build a new Holy City, yet she was aware such an endeavor could not be accomplished in one or two days. So before then, she could at least observe the abilities of this prince, and what made these witches consider him worthy to be followed.

After having breakfast, Agatha was accompanied by Wendy to the grey-haired prince's office.

His appearance bore a resemblance to those living over 400 years ago, but he gave out a peculiar feeling compared with the common mercenary soldiers, merchants, and farmers from the downtown area. Even a family steward like Kraft was not the same, just by gazing into his eyes you could feel the depth of his thoughts was not that profound, and although at a simple glance you could tell he was a decade older, it seemed like an empty number. But this way of analyzing could not be used on the prince, particularly his eyes, clearly just ordinary pupils, yet gave those peeking into them an indescribable sense of confidence. A demeanor derived from a calm and peaceful life, as if he had lived for thousands of years, and had all the knowledge in the world.

Why did he give out this feeling?

Roland Wimbledon.

In a corner of her mind, Agatha recalled his name.

“How was last night’s rest?” The prince smiled. “Does wheat porridge and fried eggs from 400 years ahead of your time suit your palate?”

“Lousy, it would have been better if you hadn’t sent a witch into my room without permission.”

Surprised by her response, the Prince shook his head helplessly, “Well, next time I’ll make sure she knocks. By the way, if you want to go outside to visit the town and observe the way the people live, you can look for Nightingale and she will lead you there. If you want to examine the historical records, you can ask Ms. Scroll, she has all the books she has read in her head.”

“The way the people live?” Agatha frowned, “The Devils’ threat is at hand; all I want to observe is the mortal who dared boast about being able to defeat the Devils. If you have no real way to stop their attack, history and lifestyle will be meaningless!”

The prince smiled, “Heavy industry is important, but light industry and people’s livelihood are important as well.”

“Heavy what? Light what?”

“It’s nothing,” said the prince as he changed his tone, “this afternoon a test of the performance of a new weapon will be conducted, there you will see. But before that, I have some question I’d like to ask you about matters 450 years ago in the Holy City of Taqila.”

A new weapon the mortals can operate? The weapons that came to Agatha's mind were a crossbow and a trebuchet, if it's an improved version of these, they are still far from enough to deal with the Devils. But she kept her thoughts secret and replied, "Go ahead."

"You mentioned before Taqila was ruled by witches, and ordinary people with no magical power were only counted as the lower class, what I want to ask is, how many meals per day did these people eat? What was their staple food? How often did they eat meat?"

She was shocked, the questions asked were entirely unexpected.

"Civilians also had status, some served under high ranked witches or doing trivial jobs like maintaining the public order, and were equivalent to the weak support witches; next were the farmers and merchants, and at the bottom were the slaves and unskilled laborers. As for your questions, I can't answer since none of the witches living in the uptown area paid any attention to what ordinary people ate. The guards and servants in my tower were supplied with three meals a day, and once a week they could eat meat, with the exception of the Months of Demons."

"How much were they paid?"

"Paid? With money?" She raised a brow. "They became my retinue, serving me as their master for all of their lives; I gave them shelter and food, I taught them knowledge, there was no

need for more rewards.”

“So, it was like that.” The prince quickly wrote something on a sheet of paper, “What about farming, raising cattle, making iron goods; were witches also part of this sort of work?”

“Of course, those are the jobs of the support witches,” Agatha replied, “Even if their skills are better than a common person, they didn’t reach the standards of the Federation.”

This sort of back and forth lasted for nearly half an hour. The prince seemed to be interested in the basic necessities and daily life in the holy cities, asking very specific questions, and making Agatha have a hard time trying to understand him. Compared with these insignificant details, did he not care about the Devils occupying most of the boundaries of the Wild Lands, and the invasion that was soon to come?

After resting for a moment, he handed the recorded contents to Scroll and continued. “You said you were a member of the Exploration Society, is this association dedicated to the study of magic stones and magic power specifically?”

Finally, a decent question, Agatha nodded. “Yes, the so-called magic stones come from the transformation of God Punishment Stones. They can suppress a witch’s ability, but can also enable the witch to display an entirely different power.”

Everyone was stunned by these words, the witch called Tilly managed to ask, “How are they made?”

Feeling the past was finally of importance in their eyes, she was feeling a little proud as she answered, “This is a secret pursued by the Exploration Society for over 400 years, so we could clarify the connection between magic and magic stones, and for which we went great lengths to achieve. I’m willing to tell you, but you need to show me that knowledge that can help raise the chances of a witch awakening in exchange.”

Tilly and Roland looked at each other, “Of course, I have no problem with that, but there is something I don’t understand.”

As she raised her left hand, the blue crystal on her finger ring reflected a striking sheen.

“This gem was found in some ancient ruins and allows me to have the ability to freely fly, so without a doubt this is a magic stone. In the fight against the Devils, whether it’s for defense or offense, it could give the troops the chance to take the initiative; even under normal circumstances it can be used to shorten travel time.” She paused. “But why did you only rely on walking when you retreated? Isn’t it strange even for a High Rank awakened witch like you not to possess a magic stone so convenient?”

Chapter 354 – Magic Stone

Agatha was surprised. She did not expect this group to actually be in possession of a flying magic stone, moreover, be aware of how to use it. She hesitated for a moment, but then continued, “We did understand the relation between magic and magic stones, but we personally were unable to manufacture them.”

“Unable to make them? What do you mean?” Tilly was surprised.

“These magic stones... they are made by the Devils.” She sighed, “If we had gotten a stable supply of magic stones, we would have used them to assist the combat witches instead of going for the God Punishment Army plan.”

“The Devils made them?” All the witches were surprised, but Roland was the only one feeling dejected.

“How much do you know about the manufacturing process?” He asked, “How were these magic stones made?”

Agatha did not want to answer to such a blunt question, but considering the Devils were the ultimate enemy of the witches, sooner or later she had to say it, regardless of the rude tone and impoliteness of this prince. She slowly replied, “Among the Devil race there is a particular individual, we call them Chaos Beasts, with the shape of a gigantic bud. It’s almost as high as 34 people standing on top of each other, and it has tentacles below, used to slowly crawl. After devouring God Punishment Stones, it can produce a variety of magic stones. Depending on the type of magic

stone, the transformation speed varies.”

“These... Have you personally seen them?”

“We managed to capture one alive,” she said with great dissatisfaction towards the questioning of the prince. “The Holy Army once took a detour from the battlefield to raid a Devil’s camp where Chaos Beasts were producing illumination stones. The witches took it back to Taqila and made it work for the city. The Devil’s IQ was extremely low, so as long as we fed it Punishment stones, it would transform them itself. It was a pity we never found a way to make it produce higher type of magic stones, neither did we know how to properly keep it. Six months later, like a plant without roots, its whole body turned yellow, withering and dying.”

“Later, the Exploration Society sent several witches to various Devil camps in order to investigate, their results confirmed it. The Chaos Beasts were the only way to obtain magic stones, and the more powerful the stone type, the slower the conversion speed. Most of the Devils would use the magic stones for combat, like the wild Devils, activating the stones embedded in their arms in order to use heavy long-range attacks. All the magic stones we acquired were from the defeated enemies or the raided camps.”

“So, this flying magic stone belonged to a Devil?” Tilly was curious.

“As far as I know, only the powerful Devil leaders would have such a magic stone,” Agatha sighed, “it probably was part of the spoils of war of some Transcendent.”

“What about the types of magic stone?” Roland frowned, “Did they have various types of magic stones right from the beginning?”

“Of course not, if that thing happened, humanity would no longer exist,” she rolled her eyes at that question. “In the time of the first war, the majority of the Devils did not use magic stones, they just relied on the vast strength of their bodies, and with only heavy armor and iron spears, they attacked the human cities. This was written in detail in the history books. In the following hundreds of years after the war started, the territory of humanity was swallowed little by little, until they were completely relegated to the Fertile Plains.” At this point she sighed, “At that time when we were closest to victory, if only there were a witch at the lead, and trained combat witches, the Devils would not have crossed the Wild Lands boundary.”

“Then, when did they start using more types of magic stones?”

“Presumably by the second War of Divine Will, their strategies also became more diverse.” Agatha’s expression sank. “The last war only lasted for 35 years and we were completely defeated. Although the elites of the Holy army could contend with the Lords of Hell, the number of enemies was far greater than ours. I heard from the Federation seniors that in the first ten years the witches held the advantage in the war. A Transcendent could sometimes thoroughly wipe a Devils army, but with the loss of more and more personnel, the war turned and we were forced to stubbornly stick to defending the cities.”

While she spoke, the prince had been completely silent and

seemed to be thinking about some serious issue.

It appears that he finally realized the Devils' terrible threat, Agatha thought, not only their numbers are huge, but also their progress moves further. While waiting for this next attack, she did not know what kind of army would show.

“The wild Devils, Dreadheart Devils, Lords of Hell, how did you divide them in these categories?” While Roland pondered, Tilly went ahead and asked.

“Yeah, these names were spread from the second War of Divine Will, they don't have much difference from each other apart from their body shapes and the magic stones they use.”

“Then, how do they multiply?”

“Uh... this,” Agatha was startled, “I am not sure, the books had not records of that. We also couldn't learn from the captured prisoners, since with no red mist, they died soon after. We lacked enough time to comprehend their language. And those who did not need the red mist were basically just wild animals, there was no way to communicate.”

“Wild animals?”

“Yes, the Devil race has a great variety of individuals, but they can be divided into two types,” she explained. “One type has magic power, but the other does not. The latter also does not need the red

mist to survive, but both the shape and intelligence are comparable to those of wild animals. For example, there is this eight-legged reptile used as transportation, with its long wings, the Devils use it to move through the sky.”

“Wait, by how you describe it, do they have this appearance?” The prince took out a picture from the drawer and spread it out in front of Agatha.

“This is indeed a Dread Beast.” The picture of the winged devil was wonderful, without doubt it was made by a witch. “Did you see this demon?”

“Not far from here,” Roland drank a sip of tea, “I thought it was a demonic beast tamed by the Devils... are they different?”

“Of course, the inferior demonic beasts are only food to the Devils, the mighty monster beasts are also their enemies. When the Months of Demons came, the Devils’ attacks decreased, and was usually a time for us to catch our breath.” Agatha paused, shifting the topic to the nearby enemy. “A place with Dread Beasts is without a doubt a Devil’s camp, where is it?”

“West of the Concealing Forest, behind the giant snowy mountains.” Roland began to tell the rough story, “...which should be covered by red mist by now.”

“No, not yet!” Agatha excitedly said, “These low towers are used as a red mist storage facility, they will constantly evaporate the stored liquid, so they need to be replenished regularly. Therefore,

the Devils will hide in the underground to minimize the consumption. We can try to capture this camp.”

“Take the initiative to attack the Devils?” The surprised witches gasped.

“If there is a Demon Eye for surveillance, it means there are ten or more Chaos Beasts in the camp. Otherwise, such far away position would not have that rare number of high Devils.” She bit her lip, “The Chaos Beasts will always retain their previous type of magic stone production, even if not a higher type. I can also use it to continue the research to discover the principle of the transformation of the God Punishment Stones!”

Chapter 355 – Miracle

Everyone was dumbfounded as they looked at her for a while, then the prince cleared his throat and asked, “Isn’t that red fog dangerous for us to approach?”

“It’s only toxic to witches. According to the findings of the Exploration Society, normal humans, animals, and plants can survive in the red fog, also flames can accelerate its dissipation.” Agatha frankly said, “Didn’t you say mortals could defeat the Devils? Prove it! The flying Dread Beast can be handed over to the flying witch,” she points at Tilly, “the rest of the people can prepare an ambush, and after waking the Devils, wait for them to come to the trap. If it’s like you said, it will be easy to take over this camp, right?”

As he smiled, Roland shook his head, “Didn’t I tell you before that this exploration was done using a hot-air balloon, and not a witch flying aided by this magic stone? The floating device can only carry a dozen people at a time, so I’m afraid there is no way to transport ordinary soldiers. Also...” He paused, “This plan you have arranged is not reasonable, with the unknown number of possible Devils lurking, close combat is extremely likely to bring casualties. Distracting the Dread Beast is also a dangerous job, I cannot have them take such risks.”

How is it possible to have a complete strategy when fighting the Devils? Agatha was angry thinking about all the times the Holy Army took the initiative, they were all prepared to give their lives in the battle against the Devils. This prince was only deceiving himself, it was normal to suffer casualties in order to achieve a goal, only those unfamiliar with the brutalities of war would be so

concerned about the lives of the army.

Although deep down she was disappointed, she restrained her emotion in order to hide these doubts. In the afternoon, when this so-called new weapon is shown, she will have her answers.

But Agatha did not hold much hope.

A prince being a sheltered strategist, a group of support witches, coupled with the weak and powerless mortals. Even if the weapon was strong, how far could they go?

Perhaps the moment the Federation crumbled, was the moment the demise of humanity was also decided.

“You mentioned the War of Divine Will several times in your words, why do you call it that? Isn’t this just a war to resist the Devil’s invasions?” Roland changed the piece of paper, and asked as he raised the quill.

“Everyone called it that, even the history books had not recorded the reason.” Agatha was feeling dejected as she replied, “It’s just said to be a war to resist the invaders, the Devils, who arrived through the stone gate at the Wild Lands’ boundary.”

“What stone gate?” Scroll interrupted.

“A Gate of Hell, raised from the underground.” She sighed, “When the Red Moon arrives, the doors from hell will open,

devouring the world we live in', that's what's written in the history books. Basically, these damn gates open every hundreds of years, the first Devils arrived at the Wild Lands' boundary through them, trying to slaughter us."

"Are the periodical attacks of the Devils also related to this?"

"They need the red fog to survive. If they leave the red fog they must carry a container, a metal box or a jar made from demonic beasts' carapace. That's the reason we had a chance to have a second and soon, a third War of Divine Will. When the stone gate appears, the Devils can build a black obelisk that produces red fog, it is almost as high as a mountain, and has a very wide range to spread the fog. One can almost cover the entire Fertile Plains." She continued, "When the next War of Divine Will begins, the Devils will certainly build a black obelisk in the center of the Fertile Plains, turning the entirety of them into their home, and relying on the red fog at the edges to attack you. This time, mankind has no way to retreat."

"If that day comes, we all can go to the Fjord and avoid them." Said Tilly as she shrugged.

"Are you talking about the islands in the Vortex Sea? Such small and narrow land could not support many people, as they wait in despair for the end." Agatha thought that wasn't a good path.

"Let's all be optimistic, at least now we have a general understanding of the Devils." The prince said as he relaxed his hands, "Until the third War of Divine Will begins, we have time to get prepared. This is the first day after your arrival, let's put aside

these matters for now and go eat lunch.”



After having finished a sumptuous lunch, Agatha followed Wendy back to her room.

The life in these savage lands, compared to what she expected was... luxurious, the food tasted far better than any of her memories. Probably because she was born in an age of strife, the food was mainly bread, dried meat and vegetable soup. But here, salt, butter, honey; everything she ate had some of those, and even some spices she could not name. Even though she tried to remain composed, she could not help sweeping an entire plate of fried mushrooms and two large servings of pepper steak.

But even so, the more she felt angry, the more she hated herself for succumbing to the temptation of this delicacy, delicious enough to make the Holy City of Taqila lose face. And in such a moment of crisis the prince was just enjoying his food. It was obvious that humanity was about to perish, and he was simply being shortsighted!

“I’m already familiar with the hallways in the castle,” Agatha said in a somewhat stiff tone, “you don’t have to trouble yourself leading me next time.”

“It’s not troublesome, I’m happy to do this...” Wendy smiled, “Moreover, you can talk to me about anything you want, if you just keep suppressing your emotions, it will only worsen your mood.”

“Didn’t he say he was going to show me the new weapon’s test in the afternoon? Why did he leave to his room after finishing lunch?”

“Are you referring to His Highness Roland? That... I think His Highness is going to take a midday nap.” Wendy said, “It’s his habit to sleep at noon. His Highness often says ‘the body is a requisite for work’, if it is not fully rested, he would not be capable of doing a proper job as a Feudal Lord.”

A midday nap! What a habit this is! Night should give him enough time to sleep! Agatha angrily thought that this was just a lazy person’s excuse, and right now he looked just like that!

“Both ordinary witches and higher ranked awakened ones... Why do you all trust him so much?” She took a deep breath, “Is it only because he gave you a place to live? Do you really believe that he can defeat the Devils... no, even win against the Church oppressing you?”

“I don’t know what the other sisters think,” Wendy softly said, “but I do. Because for His Highness to be able to turn things others cannot imagine or even dare to imagine into reality, for me, that is nothing but a miracle.”

“Mira... cle?”

“When we witches were hunted and chased down, he saved the Cooperation Association; when everyone saw us as evil, he created

a land where witches and common people could coexist. In one short year His Highness' army, which was made up of civilians, defended against the demonic beasts, defeated Duke Osmond Ryan, who had an army several times larger than him. Even the berserker army from Graycastle had no way of stepping into the western region."

"But these are just mortals' battles, they are totally different from the God Punishment Army or the Devils." Agatha shook her head.

"Of course, it is not only that," Wendy added, "he taught us his knowledge and ideas, allowing four sisters to evolve. He had not only built powerful machines, but also weapons capable of making knights, or even ordinary men, able to defeat an Exceed... These are the miracles I have seen, not epic stories told in a tavern, or legends read in some book, I was a witness to them all."

"He will one day become King of Greycastle, leading us to defeat any foe." Her eyes had a warm expression and her voice was full of conviction, "This, I believe so."

The "gate" is described using this [name](#)

Chapter 356 – 152!

Weapons capable of making even ordinary men, able to defeat an Exceed.

After Wendy left, Agatha had these words on her mind, did they really know what an Exceed was?

It was a pity she did not have an assessing magic stone at hand, otherwise she could understand the amount of magic power and types of these people more clearly.

As she was feeling impatient, Nightingale appeared in the doorway, “His Highness has invited you to observe the test of the new weapon, but if you don’t want to go...”

“I’ll go,” she quickly replied, “please lead the way.”

After seeing the sleepy face of the yawning prince Roland, Agatha felt the urge to ditch him and have him completely wake up and clear his mind. However, this kind of behavior would be easily misunderstood by the other witches, so she could only endure.

After leaving the castle, it was her first time seeing the whole picture of this small town during daytime.

Against the snowy background, the first thing that came to her mind were the neat, orderly, two story houses. Their sizes and shapes were almost identical. The white outlines and the sloping

red-tiled roofs seemed to have a special harmony. The black colored streets were all completely straight, dividing the town into squares of similar sizes. From a distance, the repeating pattern of buildings, a cycle of trees, streets, trees, streets, was like an orderly stack of layers.

Even in Taqila, the inner city was unable to be so neat and orderly!

But those were all the feelings she had for such a city. In this town, apart from the castle, there were no buildings worth seeing. Even the castle itself was far less grandiose than Taqila's Exploration Society high tower.

It's just a small town after all, Agatha whispered in her heart with disdain, then turned towards Nightingale and asked, "How many people live here?"

"Well... At first, there were only 2,000 people. But now, with the refugees from the northern and southern regions, it's close to 30,000 people"

Daring to say that 2,000 people would defeat the Devils, it's simply nonsense....

30... 30,000? Agatha was startled, even Taqila at its peak had 50,000. How can this palm-sized piece of land have 30,000 inhabitants? She didn't count the population of the surrounding villages, did she?

Although these square brick houses seemed to hold more inhabitants than the wooden one-story houses, the increase in population was not a simple problem solved by stacking houses on top of each other. When the population exceeded a certain threshold, the demand for services would multiply. First, the demand for food and potable water will increase dramatically. Second, the public security of the new housing areas and the slums will worsen. And finally, the disposal of human excretions would become a thorny issue.

In the latter half of the second War of Divine Will, Taqila had encountered such problem. As the major cities fell to the enemy, the surge of people pouring into the Holy City sharply increased the population. But instead of enhancing the defensive strength, it almost paralyzed the city. It wasn't until the Federation forced the removal of a group of refugees that the situation finally stabilized.

Because she experienced it firsthand, Agatha knew the difficulties of expanding the urban population. Looking at the other party's careless appearance, she was skeptical. Maybe Nightingale didn't know the answer and was just teasing her.

Maybe in the future she should ask this kind of questions to Wendy, she thought that at least, her attitude looked more sincere.

Across the crowded streets, Agatha followed the prince and the others to a city wall. This type of low wall was the completely opposite to the towering walls she remembered, strong but not crooked. The wall had no spikes and there were no moats around it. The Devils would not need any siege equipment and could only depend on their own hands and feet to climb it.

The disappointment in her heart only grew.

Every hundred steps in the wall had a protruding, more spacious platform, like a bed to set up a big ballista. Not long after reaching the top of the wall, Agatha soon saw the object of this test.

The shape of the weapon was quite peculiar, making it hard for people to ignore its existence.

It was a long tubular object apparently made of metal, a bit like an iron spear enlarged several times, but without the typical spear head. Its whole body was smooth, with a silver-grey color, likely not made of iron. The parts at the controlling end of the tube seemed complex, in addition to the fixed rest, and it had two shorter tubes fitted in the lower side. It neither had ropes nor arrows. In light of such design, it didn't look like an enlarged version of a ballista or trebuchet.

But she also did not figure out how this weapon would attack the enemy.

“This is the latest developed weapon of Border Town, a symbol of justice and glory, the 152-millimeter fortress-type standard artillery!” The prince Roland exclaimed, “Compared to the 12-pound field cannons, it has a number of improvements, all of its characteristics are outstanding, surely worthy to be called an era-changing weapon!”

Agatha frowned, a what of justice and glory? Fortress standard,

they all sound like frivolous feelings. But behind the very awkward introduction, the chance that all these words were made up were low. Is he really a well-read and accomplished man, this prince that is deeply trusted by the witches?

Clap, clap, clap The only person applauding in the scene was Nightingale, turning the atmosphere a bit stiff.

Cough, cough Roland cleared his throat, "It's useless to continue talking, lets carry on with the test. Iron Axe, begin."

"Yes, Your Highness." The three people wearing uniforms immediately moved into action.

Agatha stood at a side, staring intently at every movement of these people, trying to figure out how this weapon worked.

She saw a man sliding down the metal slab at the back end of the long tube, then another man immediately stuffed an orange-yellow pointed object into the pipe, and then closed up the metal slab.

"Report, preparations are complete, ready to fire!"

"Everybody, cover your ears," said the prince as he made a motion with his own hands. "Open fire."

Wait... The preparations are already complete? Just as Agatha wanted to ask, a loud bang suddenly resounded in her ears, leaving a buzzing sound inside. The surroundings seemed to suddenly

become distantly quiet, a red-orange flame erupted from the front section of the metal tube, it was a dazzling and short moment. The explosion contained a powerful force, making the wall beneath her feet tremble, feeling the heat wave head-on made her drew back a couple steps. The cannon itself was too heavy and sank backwards, but it soon returned to its original position.

“...” Nightingale supported her from behind and appeared to be saying something, but she could only faintly hear some intermittent words, as if she talked from a very faraway place...

Until the buzzing sound gradually faded and her hearing returned to normal she heard Nightingale asking, “Are you okay?”

She shook her head and turned her eyes to the snowy open area ahead, but no changes could be seen.

Is this flame only to intimidate the enemy?

“Did you see the point of impact?” The prince asked a green-haired witch.

“It landed in the hill close to the red flag,” the witch waited for a moment, “but it still went further.”

Red flag? Agatha casts a doubtful glance at Roland, what the hell are they talking about?

Fortunately, the prince soon answered her doubts. “This weapon

is somewhat like a ballista that you know of, it launches a projectile out and it's used to fight enemies that are far away. In order to observe its range, I had Lightning drop a marker every 1 kilometer, the red flag was the last one at 5 kilometers from here." He continued to explain, "According to the measurements you are familiar with, 1 kilometer is almost 300 zhang (3.33m), close to 2 li (0.5 km) of distance."

Agatha stood still, did the prince mean that he had just sent a ballista bolt 10 li into the distance? With no rope or any other means to gather power, just how did he do that? Even the magic-driven Siege Beasts only had its farthest shooting distance be 3 to 4 li. If he didn't lie, as long as they are built atop of a big wall, with this weapon they could be capable of effectively blocking the Devils' attacks.

But... for a weapon of such an amazing range, continuous fire was not easy to achieve.

"I can't see where the shell fell." The prince touched his chin and said, "The next test will be three bursts of rapid fire at a flat trajectory, the close distance attack is next."

Chapter 357 – Not A Finished Product

The second time it opened fire, Agatha covered her ears ahead of time.

She saw an inconceivable scene.

She did not expect that under the heavy load of power, the seemingly huge metal pipe still showed a completely inconsistent lightness. Every time it shot the earth shook, but the base of the weapon remained motionless, as if the two were not connected. The long tube just recoiled and went back to its original position in a quick and accurate manner. All these procedures didn't even require the work of all four operators, only three of them were busy and the fourth one, called Iron Axe, was merely standing at a side issuing orders.

Open the back metal cover, remove the copper shell, insert the new projectile, and open fire... Then repeat again. Agatha could feel the thunderous, earth-shaking roar almost every ten breaths. And at this close range she could even witness the rising pillars of snow and dirt, so the prince did not deceive her, the weapon indeed shot the projectile. Also, the speed was too fast to catch it with the naked eye, judging by the time from the explosion to the rising of the snow pillar, even a Transcendent could not evade this attack!

Agatha stared at this silvery-white long tube weapon, thinking of it as outrageous.

If... If Taqila had such a powerful weapon, we might've been able to stop all the feared Devils under the city wall. We could've avoided the destruction of the city walls, and without falling into a battle of attrition, the war could have moved in a different way, not ending so badly.

“Is this a weapon made by a witch?” After some time, she swallowed saliva and asked in a low voice. Judging by its shiny and polished appearance, this was obviously not the work of ordinary people with their hands and hammers.

But the reply of the prince surprised her.

“A masterpiece of the work of mortals and witches,” he smiled, “from the smelting to the casting of the stronghold-type artillery cannon's pieces, it all was the work of witches. But the credit for the shell used for firing goes to the alchemists. By the way, in addition to Anna, the rest of the witches participating in the manufacturing process are your so-called support witches.”

Agatha suddenly felt a crack spreading in her previous mindset. She always thought she was tolerant enough in the way she treated ordinary people, to the point she received scorn from the Exploration Society. But looking back to it now, did she really do enough?

Were the ways of the Federation wrong the whole time? What the Prince said was right... Mortals can defeat the Devils.

But if the cooperation of witches and ordinary people can give

birth to something this powerful, why did the first War of Divine Will ended up with a crushing defeat?

This question remained in her mind, making Agatha feel extremely confused.



As the artillery cannon continued to spew flames, Tilly felt similarly shocked.

Although she had seen the scene of the city wall cannons firing at the demonic beasts, the flaws of those weapons were very obvious from the beginning. At long range it was very hard to hit a target, and if the enemy approached, the cannon was unable to attack downwards. Only at a medium range, the weapon could exert its best power. However, the loading speed was low so when dealing with agile demonic beasts, the cannon would probably haven't fired when the enemy already arrived at the foot of the wall.

In addition, in order to quickly reload it, the artillery group needed from five to ten people to operate. And if one person failed, it would affect the whole process. Also, the ignition of the cannon required for someone to look after a fire, so if rain came, the field artillery might perhaps not play any role.

But Roland's newly-developed stronghold-type artillery no longer had any of those shortcomings.

Making it reload from the back end allowed the muzzle to be lowered below the cannon's tail, considerably increasing its short range. The firing rate increased more than double, but the personnel instead decreased to three operators. Without the need for an open flame to ignite the firing mechanism, it could be used in bad weather, plus the range was far greater than trebuchets. It was fully worthy of the words "Era-changing weapon" that Roland said.

Even though it required the ability of witches to produce, Tilly believed this was only a temporary issue. The reports from Sylvie could be used as proof: Once, only the chief knight was equipped with a revolver rifle, but now it was handed over to every soldier. Anna only needed to create a batch of equipment specialized in producing this weapon, then the casting and assembling could be made by the workers themselves.

Seeing the expressions in Ashes' and Andrea's faces, the stronghold artillery was similarly an unimaginable thing for them.

It's a good thing to have such a reliable ally, but as a brother it feels like he's becoming more distant.

She even felt like Roland had gone way far ahead of herself.

This made Tilly feel slightly at a loss.

If only he could be more honest.



Roland saw the shells he made with great pains being consumed in the blink of an eye, filling his heart with pain. Even so, he had to maintain a poker-face, concealing his feelings, keeping any of them from showing.

This was not the real firing test of the new artillery cannon in the truest sense.

In order to smoothly achieve a good demonstration effect, he had Iron Axe pick out a team from the cannon teams to form an elite artillery team, and had them perform dry shooting exercises for several days. During this period, they also carried out two rounds of live ammunition practice. But this time, it was specially done to display its power to the witches observing.

The shooting process went very well. The result was ideal, and at least from Agatha’s shocked face, the artillery performed beyond her imagination.

But for Roland, the shooting performance of the stronghold artillery cannon was far from counting as acceptable.

Apart from being 152 mm like the sacred caliber, the other parts were far from the real 152. With Anna’s precision processing ability, matching the element purification of Lucia, and finally having Sylvie detect any flaws; in theory, he could make a modern piece of artillery in the truest sense, instead of a 7-8km range imitation.

The key was in the small details.

At the moment, the barrel chamber was set too small.

Considering the problem of fixing the projectile's weight, Roland intentionally narrowed the volume of the barrel chamber, causing the powder charge to be insufficient. Although it had a slender tube of 40 times its diameter in length, the firing distance was still not quite ideal.

Another point was the propellant.

Because nitroglycerin was still in the trial phase, the shells were completely filled with nitrocellulose, which also was the cause of Roland's distress since it was enough to fill thousands of bullet rounds. In addition, these smoke-less propellants had not been treated by the gelling processing, which in return, further reduced the range.

The final shell itself was just an enlarged version of a bullet. The warhead was not loaded, the lethality entirely depended on the kinetic force, so missing the target meant zero damage. At this stage, it could only be used to attack slow moving targets.

In short, if he wanted to do a covering barrage and have the artillery wash over the battlefield, he still had a long way to go.

However, Roland felt that the time might not be as abundant as

he first expected.

Since discovering the magic stones were unexpectedly made by the Devils, a sound of warning inside him grew more and more intense.

If the Devils also have their own science and technology, can they show a similar technological progress, increased by leaps and bounds?

Chapter 358 – Rejection

This was not a wild guess, the human civilization was perfect proof of that.

From the Stone Age to the Iron Age, humanity had spent nearly 1 million years, but the time it took from the Iron Age to the Steam Era was less, only 3,200 years. Then from the Steam Era into the Electric Era it only took humans 150 years, and it became progressively less, requiring only a mere 50 years until they directly arrived at the Information Era.

From what Agatha disclosed, the Devils were not a stagnated group. Over 800 years ago, they and humans had a similar mode of fighting, bringing bronze and pig iron shields into close combat, and to fight witches, some high rank Devils also wore God Punishment Stones. On the siege warfare side, when facing against the wall-mounted ballistae, the Devils basically had no effective methods to cope with these long-range attacking weapons other than trebuchets, and often had to pay with heavy casualties to conquer a city. If not for their natural monstrous strength, he was almost certain that the ultimate victor of the first War of Divine Will would have been humanity.

But by the time of the second War of Divine Will, the other side had already developed a method to mass produce magic stones. Different ethnic groups had been created among them, with different types of Devils to serve various tasks, now even a large number of Devils possessed the means to attack from long range. Listening to what Agatha explained, they even made use of magic stones to power transport tools and engineering equipment! And now that more than 400 years have passed, what would they have

evolved into?

Roland had originally thought Agatha could bring him close to the magic stone technology from the Exploration Society, and thus, opening a new road of industrial development. But he didn't expect this new technology would come from the enemy. So, the upcoming battle against the Devils was likely to turn into a war of industrial science versus magic stone science.

Whoever develops faster will achieve the final victory.

Reaching this conclusion, Roland couldn't help but to sigh, it seemed he and Tilly needed to discuss things as well.



After having dinner, Roland invited Tilly Wimbledon into his office.

Seeing the other party arrive alone, he felt quite happy that at least in terms of trust, there had been considerable progress.

"I heard from Nightingale that you wanted to talk with me about something." she said as she sat down, going straight to the point.

"Yes." Roland poured a cup of tea and handed it over to her, "The main point is how to deal with the third War of Divine Will, as well as our future."

Tilly received the cup and stared at him, as if asking him to continue.

“From the words of Agatha, the Four Great Kingdoms are nothing but a small corner of the land. In the formerly prosperous Fertile Plains, mankind has already lost twice at the hands of the Devils, and had to retreat to this narrow place. And according to the time left before the Stone Gate opens again, the third War of Divine Will is not far off.” Roland hesitated for a moment, then frankly said, “I was hoping you could stay here.”

Tilly was startled, but then with a light smile she said, “I didn’t think you would say that.”

“The Devils’ strength is unpredictable, we must gather all the power we can get our hands on if we hope to have a chance at winning this war. Although Agatha said that the first War of Divine Will was fought with the collaboration between humans and witches, it was likely just a collaboration on the surface, and was not much different from the second War of Divine Will, if at all.” He then continued with a sincere tone, “You also noticed, some of the memories that are in my mind have the knowledge of weapons capable of defeating the Devils. So once these ideas are transformed into reality, the strength of humans will burst beyond your imaginations. If the witches are responsible for building revolutionary machines, then it is the right choice for ordinary people to go fight in the war. After all, in the impending war that is coming, every one of them would be equally strong.”

“... ..” Tilly slowly drank a sip of tea but did not reply, causing

Roland's heart to sink.

But it was useless to worry about this, so with a composed expression, he quietly waited for the other party to open her mouth.

Almost half a minute later Tilly finally sighed, breaking the silence, "If I choose to stay, what would the witches of Sleeping Island do?"

Does this means... You agree? Roland was trying to contain his excitement, "Have them all come to Border Town, they will be gladly accepted here. I will assign a special territory for the witches' housing, and their treatment will be the same as those in the Witch Union- Oh, I won't force them to join the Witch Union, they will still be led by you, and the assigned area will be equivalent to a self-governing zone in the western region. This would facilitate cooperation while also improving our mutual understanding."

"The treatment will be the same for everyone?" she could not help to laugh slightly, "Even if you don't ostracize them based on their abilities, you must know that not all of them have a way to fight for you."

"No, no," Roland waved his hand, "in the cooperation model I envision, the support witches can play an even bigger role than combat witches. They might not strengthen themselves, but in return they can increase the power of millions of common people- no, it's not like they lack in combat power, they only lack the knowledge to use their strengths. In this regard, the abilities of the

support witches are extremely high.”

“So that’s what you were really up to?” Tilly shrewdly asked.

“Uh–”

“Indeed, a condition with many merits,” Tilly smiled as she shook her head, “publicly, I cannot refuse to fight against the Devils with you, and between us, I’d like to stay here too and learn all that interesting knowledge... But right now I can’t promise you that.”

This surprised Roland and subconsciously asked, “Why?”

“Since I am the leader of Sleeping Island witches, they cannot move based only on my personal preferences. Once we relocate to the western region, this organization is bound to lose its independence, and in the face of any change, they will be powerless to resist it. And let’s say one day some conflict arises, would all the witches be able to pack their bags and go back to Sleeping Island again?”

“No, how could there possible be–”

“I cannot place their future on a simple vocal promise.” Tilly said, interrupting Roland. “If you were me, based purely on an allies’ relationship, would you leave them all completely on their own?”

Roland suddenly stiffened, the answer hardly needed any thinking. If he were to encounter such a choice, it would not be easy to agree. Most of the time, the closer one gets, the easier it is for conflict to appear. Like the saying goes: befriend those far away and attack those close nearby. Even emotional relations were the same.

“Look, your concerns are the same as mine.”

“But... you are my sister, I would never harm you.” Roland had to make one last effort.

“I am... but I still cannot trust in your reasons,” she wore a sad expression as she closed her eyes, “that’s why I can’t promise it right now.” She paused, trying to abandon these thoughts, “Let’s get along as allies for the moment– I’ll fully support the expansion of Border Town, if there is a witch you need, I’ll try to meet your request as soon as possible... And if the time comes when it is hard to resist the attacks of the Devils, you can always come to Sleeping Island and spend the rest of your days living a peaceful life. This is all I can promise you right now.”

Chapter 359 – Different Choices

The flame of the fireplace flickered twice, gradually fading. Nightingale went ahead and tossed in a few more sticks, causing the hearth to make crackling noises, and the flames to rise and brighten up.

Roland was looking at the elongated shadow cast by a cup, letting out a deep sigh. Tilly had already left some time ago, but he was still thinking about their earlier conversation, hoping to find a way to change the result. But he couldn't find an answer— Trust was indeed a wonderful thing, apart from investing time, every other method would have very little effect.

“So there are things you cannot do,” Nightingale clapped her hands to remove the dust, then went back to sit in her usual spot, “what did you tell her that day?”

“A white lie,” Roland leaned back on his chair as he continued, “it's normal that she does not want to believe it.” He paused, “You said you used to have a brother, if he suddenly became a different person from what you remembered, and emphasized he was still your brother, would you believe him?”

“You mean the one that looks kind-hearted, but after turning around betrays you, that guy?” Nightingale twisted her lips, “To me, he would seem basically the same.”

“Well, I shouldn't have mentioned this.”

“It doesn’t matter, after all I’m no longer part of the Glen family, they are only strangers now.” she added.

“She and I used to be like total strangers,” Roland sighed, “or rather, I did not get along very well with everyone at the palace.”

“If you are bored, you might as well tell me.” Nightingale showed a faint smile, “I’ve been very curious about life at the palace, and I always wondered about your personality, awful enough to spread your bad reputation to Silver Light City.”

“To be honest, I was a lot worse than the current me.” Roland was unable to keep his mouth from slightly twisting as he tried to recall a few of his memories. “Probably when I dropped her into glass shards, that was the moment she began to loathe me.”

“It was really quite... bad,” she smacked her lips, “but I think, she no longer hates you.”

“Oh?” Roland raised a brow, “How do you know that?”

“Obviously, didn’t she say those words? ‘Between us, I’d like to stay here too and learn all that interesting knowledge’.” Nightingale said while imitating Tilly, “Sounded like comforting speech, but the truth was, she was not lying when she said that. If she was as disgusted as she used to be, she wouldn’t want to stay here.”

“Are you trying to make me feel better?” Roland asked with a

smile.

“Those are just facts,” she shrugged her shoulders, “also, I think it is good to maintain the current status quo.”

“Why?”

“She promised to provide you with witches when you request for them, to help you fight back against the Devils, so there’s basically no difference. If suddenly all of Sleeping Island’s witches pour into the town, and there are several fellows like Ashes, I would probably be very busy,” Nightingale threw a piece of dried fish into her mouth, then mumbled, “not everyone is as obedient as Maggie.”

Roland could not help laughing out loud, “Listening to you say that, it looks like you see Ashes as troublesome.”

“Huh? No, how could I?” Nightingale just waved her hand, “I’m just occasionally keeping an eye on her, in case she tries to do something against the Witch Union members.”

“Really?” He said.

She just leaned backwards, and began whistling.

“I don’t know if I’m imagining this,” Roland stared at her, “why does it always feel like you’re actually happy after I get rejected?”

“It’s just your imagination.” Nightingale affirmed, then she looked towards the door. “Oh, looks like someone is coming.” she said as her figures disappeared.

Is she trying to run away?

Just as he was thinking that, there was a knock on the door.

Roland was startled, it was almost midnight now, who could come at such late hour?

He replaced the old candle in the candlestick with a new one and said, “Come in.”

The one who opened the door was Agatha. This really surprised the prince.

“What’s the matter?” he said.

The opposite party entered without a word and just moved to a chair, and after sitting down she opened her mouth, “I heard from Ms. Wendy, both the revolver weapon capable of restraining an Exceed, or the artillery of amazing range, those were all your ideas? And the methods and principles on how they work are all in those books you wrote?”

“You mean 《Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science》 and

《Elementary Chemistry》? In them is indeed written with the correlating principle, but as for the production method, it is not completely explained since the space is limited.” Roland answered, “After all, it is just a textbook of elementary theory. You came all the way here to ask me that?”

“Only members of the Witch Union can learn this knowledge, right?” she did not answer but instead asked a new question.

Roland only nodded, he already guessed what the other party wanted to say.

“Then I will apply to join the Witch Union.” Agatha said immediately.

“But the Witch Union is an organization belonging to Border Town, are you sure you want to work for such a small town?” he curiously asked, “Its lord is not a transcendent, just a mere mortal.”

“One capable of making weapons to fight against the Devils can’t be considered a ‘mere’ mortal, even the Exploration Society would have a seat for you,” Agatha paused, “as long as it does not cause harm to witches, or the Federation survivors, I do not mind... cooperating with mortals.”

Perhaps it was difficult for her to say “serving a mortal”, but Agatha’s ability to adapt really impressed Roland, maybe those who did research were more inclined to accept new things more quickly.

He resisted showing a smile, “I thought you would follow Tilly to Sleeping Island, they have a city of witches there.”

“A refuge to escape from the Church hunting,” she shook her head, “I spoke with them before making this decision. And I’ve already seen many cities ruled by witches, they are just buried in the dust now. There is no point if we do not defeat the Devils, and I expect to find the hope to achieve victory here.”

“You will,” Roland nodded, “but about not being hostile against the Federation, I cannot guarantee that. Because it probably didn’t just die out, but instead changed its name and went into hiding.”

“What?” Agatha was surprised by those words.

“I’ve thought about what you said, even if they failed in escaping from Taqila, the Federation had a Transcendent and a group of Holy Warriors. In this patch of uncivilized land full of indigenous people, it is unlikely to completely stop rumors from spreading, unless they actively do it themselves.” Roland’s voice went down a tone, “The Church is likely the embodiment of the Federation— it was not that the common people brought down the witches from power and got their hands on a way to make the God Punishment Army, but it was the witches themselves who turned the Federation into a witch-hunting organization. This way, it was easier to create a bigger God Punishment Army.”

“You mean... it is because of the Federation that witches are now suffering from oppression and being hunted? I just can’t believe

that.” she said.

“I’m not sure, it still is just a theory,” Roland stood up and walked to the bookshelf, after drawing a few heavy black books, he handed them over to her, “these books contain the history of the Church written by their own hand, and the history of the Four Great Kingdoms recorded by astrologers, you can refer to them. Anyway, the Church is now our enemy, and it needs to be destroyed in the future...”

“If you decide to stand on the witches’ side and join me against the Devils, the Witch Union welcomes you.”

Chapter 360 – Ice

The next morning, Agatha received a fine roll of parchment from Roland.

“What is this?”

“A contract. You only need to sign it by pressing your finger in it, and you will officially become part of the Witch Union.”

She unfolded the roll of parchment, and after reading the contents inside a few times, she exclaimed surprised, “Is this it?”

“Huh,” Roland seemed to not understand what she meant, “what is?”

“The deterrent here is meaningless,” Agatha pointed to a line of the contract’s clauses, “it only mentions that in the absence of a consensus of both parties, your actions should not betray Border Town, but there is no binding statute. If someone really wanted to be disloyal, I think there would not be any psychological pressure. Also, the words are too lax, is this really a contract?”

“Well, I only wrote it down today, it is just a formality.” the prince nodded, unsurprisingly, it appeared he was not the kind of person to concern over fine details in the contract.

“A contract filled with loopholes.” she secretly disagreed, poked her thumb in the ink pad and signed the contract by pressing down

her inked thumb in it.

The Union contract demanded little on both sides, according to the terms on it, it was still very much the same as it has been so far after joining. Although she felt it was a little excessive, she also felt somewhat relaxed.

She said cooperating with mortals, but in her heart, she knew this grey-haired man was the actual leader of the Witch Union. If she had to treat a mortal the same way as a high rank of the Federation or a master of the three Holy Cities, she was afraid it would be very difficult to accept. For now, at least she had a considerable amount of freedom.

Roland received the parchment and asked with curiosity, “In Taqila, what were the deterrents in the contracts?”

“You only needed them when recruiting ordinary people, and it ranged from mental torture to all sorts of physical punishment,” she skimmed, “as for us witches, there was no need to sign such thing. The Federation was a system you belonged to your whole life, once one joined, the only way to defect was by dying.”

“Well,” he took a breath, “I officially welcome you as a member of the Witch Union. After breakfast, remember to come to the castle garden, I need to fully test your ability.”



The whole testing process was simpler than what Agatha imagined, she only had to demonstrate various characteristics of her ability, and after answering a few more questions, it was already over.

“The shape of her magic power is like a sky-blue pentagon prism, it is around the medium level.”

“Summoning type, and the ability has evolved once up until now. The initial effect was to be able to lower the temperature, but after evolution, solidification at room temperature could be achieved. A very convenient ability.” Roland then asked, after recording, “How did you evolve your ability?”

“Continuous practice until I finally had a revelation.” she said with pride, after all she was the youngest witch to reach an advanced awakening, and at that time everyone in the Federation called her ‘Taqila’s Genius’.

“Every day I tried to drop the temperature lower and lower, so that water could be frozen more quickly. Then one day, I saw a witch manipulating the flames in order to melt a chunk of solid lead, and as the flames continued to burn, the liquid lead began to boil.”

“That sight made me realize something, maybe everything has three states: gaseous, liquid and solid— The lead was solid at room temperature, but as long as the temperature was high enough, it could also turn into a gas; water was liquid at room temperature, and if the temperature dropped, it would solidify into ice.”

“Then, the gaseous air present at room temperature, would it be like lead? as long as the temperature is low enough, could it freeze?”

“Holding this thought to use my ability, I then soon felt the magic power inside my body undergoing radical changes, and I was eventually promoted to the high ranked witches. This enlightenment was also recorded in the 《General Principles of Natural Law》.”

In fact, she was the youngest ever to be in the book. At that time, the Three High Seats praised her highly, that this insight was not only a great inspiration for a witch’s evolution, but it also remarked the importance of the natural studies. But after solemnly uttering these words, the opposite party was quite calm.

“So that happened,” the prince nodded, “what is this 《General Principles of Natural Law》?”

“Wait, you... don’t you feel surprised?” Agatha in turn was surprised in a different way, “The world is filled with gas, it’s barely noticeable and has no weight. In fact, it can turn into liquid and flow like the water, and can also be condensed and turn into ice.”

“It’s a normal phenomenon, there are also many kinds of gases, each one with its own distinctive boiling point and solidification point,” Roland shrugged his shoulders, “why should I be surprised? These contents are general knowledge in 《Theoretical

Foundations of Natural Science》.”

“... ..” Agatha suddenly felt her chest a little heavy, then took two breaths, “Well, I will study that book thoroughly.

“General Principles of Natural Law— it is a record of all the enlightenments and processes that led to the evolution of all the high ranked witches.” She grumpily continued, “But each witch’s ability is different, so it is difficult to evolve based on imitation and reference, and it obviously can’t compare with your 《Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science》!”

“Did I say something wrong?” The prince had a puzzled face.

“No, I was just too arrogant.” Agatha felt her heart more oppressed.

Cough, cough. Seeing the displeasure in her face, he tried to change the subject, “You said that every witch’s ability is different... The Federation had thousands of witches, was there nobody with a repeated ability?”

“No,” she gave a stiff reply, “the Exploration Society could also see the shape of the magical power, but there was no witch with the same shape of magic.”

“But before, when you saw Anna, you said she had a flame-class ability.”

“It was just a common method of ability division, it’s just simple and easy to understand. The illumination ability that gives off heat is called flame-class, but as the magic power grows, or it enters the adulthood period solidification, or even high rank evolution, seemingly identical abilities can show enormous changes.”

“In the initial stages of the flame-class ability, some witches are better at controlling the temperature, some other can produce an even bigger flame, and there are even ones that can project out the flame. Even if we don’t see a difference in their abilities for a while, it does not mean that a change is not occurring.” Agatha said, “The method of the Exploration Society is more formal, but in general, it is the same as how you split their abilities.”

“Also with three categories?” Roland asked.

“Four categories. The main difference is the summoning type—The Exploration Society divided it in two types, one called magic energy, and the other model shaping. You should be able to understand the difference with only the words.”

“Magic energy is like Anna, who needs to continuously consume magic power, and once the magic power stops, the flame disappears. And model shaping is like the paint coating of Soraya, it can remain for a long time even after the magic power stopped acting?”

“Although I’m not familiar with the ability of Soraya, that’s basically what it means... It can exist for a long time, another form of model shaping type is, for example, my room-temperature solidification.”

“I understand.” Roland said after recording all these things, “Let’s end today’s test here. As a general rule, when I have not assigned any duty to you, you can come and practice your ability, but I think there is someone who could use your help now.”

“Who?”

“Border Town’s Chief Alchemist, Kyle Sichi.”

Chapter 361 – Expansion

According to the written records, the most important part of large-scale nitroglycerin manufacturing was temperature control, since a large exothermic reaction could easily cause the sensitive explosives to blow up. As long as the temperature of the large reaction container was constant, you could safely produce nitroglycerin in bulk.

The laboratory tried using ice to decrease the temperature, however they lacked the ability to mass produce it— The heat transfer effect of ice water was limited, and when met with a big exothermic reaction, the cooling rate was very slow. It also consumed the ice very fast, making the production troublesome.

But Agatha's Ice Coffin could easily produce temperatures hundreds of degrees below the freezing point of water, it would be without doubt, the perfect cooling method for the container.

Roland didn't know if his prediction was going to be reliable, but that would not prevent him from trying. Even if there were an incident, Nana would be there as a last insurance.

After returning to the office, he wrote an introduction letter then gave it to one of his personal guards, and had him take Agatha to the chemical laboratory to deliver the letter to Kyle Sichi's hand.

In the letter, in addition to explaining Agatha's ability, he also made up a false background of a careless noble who became destitute and wandered here. He hoped this would serve to make

the Alchemist control his temper, and treat the witch as someone who could bring enormous help to the chemical experiment.

After the guard left, Roland was still a little worried, Kyle had a straightforward personality, and Agatha was a conceited witch from ancient times. I hope they don't quarrel too much.

As he was wondering if he should go to the laboratory in person, Scroll opened the door and walked in.

"Your Highness, the results of the second batch of the popular education exams came out," her eyes were smiling, "this time, there were seven hundred and sixty-two people who qualified, and also half of them are adults."

"This many?" Roland's heart was jumping in joy.

Compared with the first group of 50 children from Karl's school, half the graduating students being adults meant that the night school program was starting to bear fruit. At the same time, it confirmed the big role the Ministry of Education had played in this progress, the learning time was shortened among other things, showing the feasibility of the teaching programs the Ministry developed.

"Yes, you have been promoting general education for almost half a year. This group of students had an age generally under 25, and grasping the basic reading and writing was not a difficult thing."

It's probably related to the text itself, if i had replaced them with Chinese it would not have been so quick. Roland thought, Although I always felt this worm-like text was too awkward.

When the introduction of general education began, he was not so confident to what extent it would spread— It was the first time this was implemented in Greycastle, so there was no precedent to follow.

In accordance with the principles of encouragement and subsidy, he discussed it with Scroll for a long time. Setting up daytime classes for children and a night school program for the working class, as well as supplementing it with a series of incentive policies to help lure workers into coming to study. And right now, the effect it had was unexpectedly quite good.

Of course, the main figure could not be left out, the responsible management of Scroll.

“You’ve really worked hard.” Roland nodded.

“It is my pleasure to serve you, Your Highness.” She gave a slight bow.

As the oldest witch of the Witch Union, Roland found it hard to compare her to the younger ones like Anna or Lightning— Scroll gave him a sense of diligence, clear and orderly. When discussing a problem, she could listen to your thoughts quietly, but would also point the mistakes in a straightforward way. He would sometimes feel like the younger one when in front of her.

Probably... she was born to be a teacher. Roland smiled and shook his head as he put these thoughts aside.

In short, with this new work force, the factories he had been arranging for a long time could finally begin to operate.

“Could you help me call Barov.” he said cheerfully.



The City Hall Chief Minister quickly arrived at the castle.

Since he began working in city matters, his workload increased day by day, even the blank area in his forehead was growing bigger and the wrinkles in his face increased in numbers. Yet, his face did not show tiredness or sleepiness, and his spirit was radiating.

“Your Highness, were you looking for me to start doing recruitment work?” the other party was also aware of the town’s new graduate group, so he took the initiative to ask.

“Yes,” Roland nodded while saying, “taking advantage that this year’s Months of Demons came earlier, and that Timothy currently cannot attack the western region, I want to expand the size of Border Town’s army in preparation for next year’s war. Simultaneously, I want to increase the number of the current factory workers.

“And the City Hall too,” he hurriedly added, “after expanding the territory, your scope of work will also increase from five to six times. The City Hall personnel should also be scaled to an appropriate size, in order to manage such broad land.

“Rest assured,” the prince smiled, “I’ve not forgotten your suggestion.” He drew out a piece of paper and started writing as he spoke, “Of the little over 700 people graduating this time, the City Hall shall provide 20% of the jobs, 40% should go to the acid manufacturing factory, and as for the remaining people, they are to be absorbed by the steam engine factory and the bicycle factory. Also, the bicycle factory needs at least 100 people. The salary should be in accordance with the previous standards, although the one for the acid manufacturing factory can be slightly raised, just be sure to fill in the required numbers as soon as possible.”

As for the soap and perfume factories, its main work was done by witches, so common people only needed to do a few simple steps, thus it was not a requirement to be literate to complete the operations so it was not included.

Roland believed that education not only improved the knowledge and vision of people, but it also gave them a sense of responsibility and social identity, this was the real meaning of enlightenment. That’s the reason the factory needed a lot of basic education— of workers who have opened up to more social attributes, came more understanding of the importance of social collaboration, altruism and self-awareness, than those more ignorant and illiterate. This was critical to the wide range of steps of the complex process and fine work.

“Yes, Your Highness.” Barov continued, “How many people will the army’s expansion need?”

“At least one thousand people, open the recruitment to newly promoted citizens and east border refugees.” Roland instructed, “Same as always, the City Hall will release the bulletin, and the First Army will be responsible for interviewing and hiring.”

“A... thousand people?” Barov was startled by the unexpected number, “This number is the same as the current number of the First Army, Your Highness. If they are to be equipped with supplies and weapons as per army’s specifications, the cost would not be low.”

“I already considered that, just do it.”

Now knowing the impending crisis of the Devils’ invasion, he could not move as slow as before. In addition to incorporating the entire West region into his own domain, as soon as next spring came, the first thing he needed to do was to completely rout Timothy.

As long as he destroyed his brother’s political power, even if he didn’t occupy the rest of the lands, this western region’s new town would without doubt become the new Kingdom’s capital. And whether it was expanding the population, or independently acting to promote trade, there was not much he could do right now.

But he had no need to disclose these plans to Barov, he only needed to arrange the financial support and the material

distribution himself.

After the City Hall Chief Minister left, a guard brought a new message.

Margaret's caravan had arrived.

Chapter 362 – Dilemma

At the side of the wharf, over ten sail ships were lining up, the tops of their masts covered in snow and ropes that seemed like wires with that white-silver layer. The refugees lined up from the ships to an open space in front of the wharf.

This was not the first time Border Town received refugees from all over of Greycastle, so the process continued in an orderly manner.

Four iron railings divided the crowd into two slender columns, helping control the flow of people and avoiding them stepping on each other. On both sides of the railings there were police officers helping with the inspection, with a short stick to keep them from pushing and climbing the railings. There were punishments, but naturally also rewards, as a mean to comfort those who had been through hard times. A bowl of steaming hot gruel was available to those refugees after crossing the inspection points. After all, a full stomach would effectively reduce the refugees' fear and discomfort of an unfamiliar territory.

This time, besides the police, the First Army and the City Hall officials, Nightingale and Sylvie were also participating in the inspection, in order to find the pill-users that Timothy might have planted in the crowd. Under the scrutiny of their magic sight, both berserker pills and Snow Powder had no place to be hidden.

“Thank you for everything you have done for the western region,” Roland turned around and said to Margaret who was at his side, “if not for your fleet, these people may had spent the

winter in the slums of other cities.”

“It was rare for Your Highness to ask for my help with such urgency, it was natural that I would do my best,” she smiled, “but many of my sailors were unwilling to sail in these heavy snowy days, so I could only arrange for 13 ships.”

“It is still better than no ships,” as Roland replied, a white vapor cloud came out of his mouth.

Since he knew there were large numbers of refugees in Silver City, Redwater City, and Willow Town, he had sent a letter requesting for Margaret’s help to the Chamber of Commerce, in hopes that she could recruit a fleet, and help with the transportation of the stranded refugees.

Although the 13 ships were less than enough, but in two more trips they could bring the rest of the people—according to the boat’s capacity of around 100 people, and the round trip of two weeks, the stranded 3,000 refugees were about a month and a half away.

The gold royals carried by the First Army could not support them all that time, so in the return trip they also had to carry food and warm clothing. Roland did not want the refugees cling to the ships, only to eventually not reach their destination alive.

Thanks to Lightning, Margaret had eventually set the transportation cost just at twice the normal price. Any other merchant might think of this as a stupid business—the cost of the

transportation alone was worth more than the goods themselves, on average a pair of gold royals per person. According to the current market value, you could buy several strong and sturdy slaves with the same money.

Margaret had also raised this topic several times, but Roland still insisted on getting these people back to the western region. From the moment they followed the messengers he sent, they were already people of the western region, it was his responsibility to provide shelter for them.

And in the eyes of Roland, these refugees were far more valuable than slaves. After education, training and re-employment, the wealth they will create with their new jobs will be enormous.



Back in the Castle Hall, Roland had the kitchen staff bring Margaret a thick soup to drive out the cold, “Drink this, your hands and feet will become warmer.”

“Thank you for your kindness,” the merchant woman scooped up a spoonful close to her nose, “it seems like it contains white wine?”

“Indeed,” he smiled, “In addition, there is also pepper and honey, the base is made of chicken soup.”

Concentrated liquor was excellent at cold times, by heating it with the chicken soup it made the taste more mellow, and the

added seasoning hid its astringent flavor, making the bowl of soup more fragrant and slightly spicy. People who did not drink could also easily enjoy it.

Margaret slowly drank the thick soup, then released a long breath, “It’s really good, every time I come here, I’m always filled with expectations, wondering what kind of novelty you’re going to show me. Unfortunately, next year I believe I won’t be able to patronize your territory as frequently.”

“Do you mean, as in trading opportunities?” Roland keenly captured the meaning of her words.

The merchant woman nodded, “Timothy has issued an order banning all saltpeter transactions, and now it’s not just King’s City, even Silver City and Redwater City are not allowed to sell it. In addition to the enforced low price to sell it to the Alchemist Association, it can only be sold to them or the city’s nobles.”

Roland frowned.

“And according to the news I heard from a contact in the town hall, he seems to be plotting a complete blockade of the western region, so I’m afraid it’s not only about saltpeter, even merchants will be intercepted at Redwater City.

“Not only Border Town, even Longsong Stronghold and Willow Town will be affected. Even though many nobles were opposed to this plan, I doubt Timothy will revoke that order.” She shook her head in a helpless manner, “So in the next year, not only will I be

unable to transport saltpeter and ingots here, but even the steam engine trade deal may need to be suspended.”

It appears like he is indeed pushed into a corner, otherwise he would not have made such a harmful move to the royal family, Roland thought, a rash intervention to the trade of the other territories before the centralization of power, is likely to stir up a revolt of the city lords and other big aristocrats.

Even if Timothy sent his own troops to enforce the land and river blockades, it would be easy for the local lords to manipulate the behind-the-scenes to eradicate them—as long as he enforced this policy for a year or so.

But trade was one of Border Town’s key points, let alone one year... even half a year could not be allowed.

Saltpeter was one of the raw materials for the large-scale acid manufacturing, and since the issue of the synthetic ammonia had not been resolved yet, its importance was enormous. Once the supply stopped, the 152-mm artillery cannon would be nothing more than an ornament, and the improvements of this new weapon would have to be postponed.

But compared to weapons, what was worse was the steam engine trading—there were not many gold royals left in the City Hall’s vault. A part of the money was used for infrastructure, increasing the number of jobs, and another part was used to pay the salaries of the city workers, so that through food, convenience goods, and housing transactions, it would be recovered, turning it into a cycle.

This economic model needed to constantly inject gold royals into the market, at least an equal amount to the wealth created by the people.

Right now, Border Town was in the early accumulation state, and had not released a credit currency, so once the steam engine trading income is gone, it would be easy to get into a state of unpaid salary, which would lead to an overall collapse of the economy.

In any case, the disruption of trade income was an absolutely unacceptable situation.

“This situation will not last long,” Roland said, “I believe you will soon be visiting this town again... No, by then, what you should see is a brand-new city.”

Margaret was slightly surprised, “You plan to build a city here?”

“After the Months of Demons are over,” he smiled, “in addition, I’m going to open a trade route that is directly connected to the Fjords, not through the Seawind Region or Clearwater Port, but directly from the western region, straight to the Fjord islands.

“I was wondering, are you interested in participating?”

Chapter 363 – New Trading Route

“Straight... from the western region?” Margaret said with curiosity, “I didn’t know there was a harbor leading to the sea.”

“Not yet, but we will build one.”

Her eyes widened, “Your Highness, are you serious?”

“Of course, we should start the construction by spring next year.” Roland smiled.

In this age, all harbors were without exception natural, a man-made harbor would be a huge project that would need to transform the landscape, so it would be nearly impossible to achieve.

But now he had the full support of Tilly, so after the construction of Sleeping Island’s housing was complete, Lotus would return to the western region. By that time the demonic beasts will retreat, so it would be a suitable time to start opening the port.

He got up and pointed to a map hanging behind him, “There is a shoal directly south of Border Town, the water depth is ideal so the area is very suitable to accommodate all the facilities required for a port. With just a little transformation, and flattening out the coastal mountains, I would be able to ship goods from the inland western region.”

“Transform the shoal... flatten out the mountains? Why do you

say these astonishing things so easily? I'll be under the illusion that they are not all that difficult," Margaret said with a little interest, "But, do you have a merchant fleet? You should know that the sailing of river boats and sea ships can be very different."

"Not at the moment," Roland said as he spread his arms, "that's why I was hoping you could participate in it."

"By providing the ships?"

"Also by being responsible for transportation and sale," he added, "the western region will only provide the goods."

This was the equivalent to having the exclusive distribution rights to the Fjords, and with Margaret's experience, she could naturally see the profit in this.

By organizing caravans to sell in the Fjords, you could earn even more, but Roland did not want to place too much effort and manpower into this. The only thing he wanted was to get his money back as soon as possible, in order to maintain the rapid development of his territory. At least until the accumulative economic state was completed, the matter regarding the introduction of a credit currency was what would happen eventually anyways.

Sure enough, the merchant woman blinked and asked excitedly, "Will you entrust everything to me?"

“As long as the price is reasonable,” Roland nodded, “If you are willing to represent the western region in the overseas trade, we can talk in detail about this. The scope of the sales should be limited to the Fjords, and it shall not be less than the selling price offered to the Crescent Moon Bay merchant caravan.”

“That is a given, a steam boat that can sail uninterrupted without the need for wind, it is worth the price those caravans are willing to pay,” her voice was full of confidence, “If sold directly to the Fjord islands, I am confident they will even pay twice the price.”

“However much profits come out, we can share it.” Roland smiled, “In addition, the main products aside the steam engine are these.” He clapped his hands, and afterwards a guard waiting outside the hall immediately came in holding a plate, on top of it were four or five glass bottles, each one only the size of a thumb.

“These are...”

“Open it and smell it.”

Margaret took the bottle and curiously opened up the wooden cork, then she put it in front of her nose to sniff it, her eyes suddenly lit up as she exclaimed, “My goodness, you made perfume!”

“I wonder how these are, compared to the ones produced by King’s City’s Alchemy Association?”

“The fragrance seems to be richer,” she held the bottle and looked at it left and right, seemingly unable to put it down, “Is this a product made by Border Town’s Alchemic Workshop?”

“Something like that,” Roland also picked up a bottle and placed it in his palm—according to his own requirements, the perfume bottles were to be made from crystal glass, which had extremely good transparency, and the shape was the standard six-sided prism. Slightly turning the bottle in the light, the perfume inside reflected different color shades, making it very visually pleasing.

According to modern sales’ philosophy, an exquisite packaging would greatly improve the product itself, and as a way to open the Fjord’s markets, he naturally had to treat this attentively. Compared to the steam engine, the perfumes were a low-cost commodity.

When Evelyn finally accepted that “the most pungent white liquor” was also a drink, she continuously delivered highly concentrated alcohol, allowing to omit even the last step of distillation. As for the rose and other flowers’ unique fragrances, they had been made into oil concentrates by Leaf. Just by mashing a few flowers, she could make a rich fragrance fill a jar of alcohol.

“Seems you like it, I’ll give these bottles to you.” He put the perfume bottle back on the plate.

“Are you sure?” Margaret smiled, “Then I’ll gladly take them.”

“I heard these can fetch a good price in the Fjords.”

“You should already be aware, but the perfume made by King’s City’s Alchemy Association is very limited in quantity every year, the supply of a thousand bottles falls too short of the demand, especially to those big merchants who pay close attention to the fish-like smell you get while traveling the seas, so perfume is a standard item for them. And since at King’s City they are sold at a price of five gold royals, at the Fjords, you can in turn sell them from 15 to 20 gold royals.

“In fact, from the perfume sold to other regions, the majority of it would be taken and resold by the sea merchants.” Margaret then said after a pause, “I don’t know about your Alchemy Workshop, how many bottles of perfume can it produce in a year?”

“If the supply of raw materials is adequate, it should be around ten times the amount that King’s City’s Alchemy Association produces,” Roland deliberately lowered the numbers—he did not want to turn such a profitable product into something as cheap as lettuce, and neither did he only want to make four or five thousand gold royals in a year. As a product tied with the steam engine, he wanted perfume to bring back the same amount of profit.

“... ..” the merchant woman was stunned for a moment before sighing, “Your territory is really unbelievable.”

“So, are you willing to sell these goods for me?”

“Of course, Your Highness,” she stood up and while placing a hand on her chest she bowed while saying, “for me, this is also a

rare opportunity.”



After achieving his goal, and having Barov continue with the specific details and terms of the contract, Roland returned to his office, and proceeded to write a letter for Theo who was currently hiding in King’s City.

Whether it was taking the initiative to overthrow Timothy, or to work on opening a new trade route, both were things he had to do. He did not want to place all his eggs in one basket, so that in the case the offensive suffered defeat, he could still continue to obtain saltpeter.

This was to walk the path of self-sustainment.

In the letter, in addition to mentioning his intention to attack, another point was to let Theo establish contact with the nitrate field workers around King’s City, in hopes of recruiting a group to send to the western region.

This year, the saltpeter merchants must not feel very comfortable. While Timothy forbids exports, and forces them to sell to the Alchemy Association at low prices, the profits of the saltpeter fields will continue to drop. Roland believed that as long as the rewards are generous enough, recruiting a group of saltpeter workers is not a difficult issue.

The principle of producing saltpeter was not complicated either, now that the population of Border Town was growing, it could easily meet the large amount of manure required by the saltpeter site, fully meeting the conditions for their self-production.

Before defeating Timothy, it would undoubtedly be a safeguard point.

Chapter 364 – Two Images

The snow falling outside the window had increased, when the small snowflakes appeared, they scattered and engulfed the sky over the town.. The grey-white flakes danced in the wind and fell to the ground in a crammed way, having the white rooftops and tree branches that were covered in a white layer merge into one. Such sight would be enough to make people feel the cold.

But even so, Tilly felt warmer instead.

She leaned back on the couch, half her body was covered with a soft woolen blanket, and her two feet were inside a bucket—this handy heating device was an invention of Roland Wimbledon. A square bucket with a couch to the side, a charcoal brazier was placed inside the bucket, and it was separated in the middle by a horizontal wooden board. It was not like a flaming bonfire, that would burn by it being too close, but it was separated enough that you could feel just enough heat. Just by placing your feet over the board, you could enjoy the warmth of the brazier, and by covering yourself with a blanket, it would feel like your whole body was surrounded by a pleasant feeling.

The snow outside the window brought out the coziness of the house, perhaps the happiness that arose from this contrast was what caused people to have a deep impression.

She had to admit, the way witches were treated here a year ago was like heaven and earth, and them not wanting to leave this town was not difficult to understand, because even to her, she was having very enjoyable moments here

Besides her, there was also Anna and Agatha—this room was Anna's bedroom, taking advantage of the scarce leisure time, every time Tilly was free, she would come knocking on the door with books, to discuss with the other party about things that puzzled her.

There were only the two of them at first, but now the ancient witch from the ruins was here too.

Anna simply moved the bucket from the table to an empty space in the room, and had Roland add two more couches. The three of them sat around the warm bucket, with their feet against each other, and worked together to learn new insights of this fascinating new knowledge.

Of course, more often than not, the questions they asked were answered by Anna.

“It is hard to believe that such a book came from a mortal's hand,” Agatha closed 《Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science》 and took a deep breath, “The more I read, the more the world feels the same, order in everything that looks like chaos, and a myriad of things following the same rules. Even if he were born in Taqila, the Federation without a doubt would have tried to bring him in, and he might even had the same status as a high ranked witch.”

At first, she raised many questions about the contents of the book, but after Anna's careful explanations, Agatha's attitude

towards Roland changed dramatically.

But Tilly believed this change was for Roland alone, all the other common people were probably still dull in her eyes. She could not help but to sigh, only she knew that none of this knowledge belonged to Roland Wimbledon, it was part of someone else, the man who suddenly appeared inside of her brother's mind.

After all these days being together and the corroboration of Sylvie, Tilly basically confirmed this. But in a way, proving that he was still himself was an impossible thing to achieve.

And the most questionable point was, did he really had no idea where those memories came from and who they belonged to? It was hard to believe that memory could be completely severed from a person's life experiences, at least this was something she herself couldn't do.

Whenever she recalled the knowledge she gained when she served as a court tutor, memories of those days would flash before her eyes.

"Where did he learn this knowledge?" Agatha let out a sigh, "I thought the studies of mortals had progressed, but these days there seems to be less difference from 400 years ago—even though it appears we still lag behind a little."

"I do not know," Tilly shrugged her shoulders, "It is impossible to learn this from the Palace's tutors."

“What kind of person was he before?”

This question made Anna also raise her head.

“Before...” Tilly pondered for a moment, “Arrogant and timid, doing things his own way, not learning any skills, and had a bad character... The only good point was perhaps the fact that he never used his status as prince to commit any crimes.”

“Well... an average person?”

“No, even in average people’s standards, he was an awful guy too,” she complained and continued, “After arriving here, he suddenly changed for the best, but I’m still unable to find out what he’s thinking... There are words he keeps to himself, but he still wants to be trusted? How can that be possible?”

The room suddenly quieted down.

“What’s the matter?” Tilly thought the girls’ gazes were weird.

“No... nothing,” Anna hid her mouth and smiled, “it’s the first time I’ve heard you say that.”

Damn it, she realized she had gone too far, such a complaint should not come from the mouth of an ally, it was probably because she was feeling very relaxed lately, “What I meant was—”

“It does not matter, His Highness would not care about such things,” Anna shook her head and smiled, “Perhaps he had his own difficulties.”

“Roland...” Tilly hesitated to continue, “hasn’t mentioned these things to you?”

“No,” Anna replied, “I haven’t asked, and if he wanted to say something, he would always say it.”

Also, she sighed in her heart, for me, the first side I saw of the Prince, should be the changed Roland, there is no point in considering this issue.

“Listening to your words, was he different from the person he is now?” Agatha asked with interest, “There is a saying in the Exploration Society, the more uncommon an extraordinary person is, the more eccentric they would be compared with ordinary people, perhaps this kind of transformation is a normal occurrence. Did Roland howl at the moon in the palace, or stare at the walls for a long time?”

“What are you saying...?” Tilly helplessly shook her head, “He used to act in an eccentric manner, but it was no different from ordinary people. But... I also heard something, it was said that he once shouted at a crowd inside the palace that he was going to marry a witch, it was probably because of this that Gerald and Timothy bullied him saying he became one of the Devil’s minions, moreover, Father was not happy with this kind of behavior. This in turn, caused his character to become more and more mischievous.”

“He was discriminated against because he wanted to marry a witch?” Agatha twisted her lips, “This would be a great ideal in Taqila. Of course, only few achieved this, most of the witches didn’t want to spend their entire lives with only one man.”

“But now it is different from 400 years ago, if he marries a witch, it would be equal to not having children to inherit his legacy, how could Father have had a favorable impression of this idea?” Tilly gave out a sigh, “But it has been over 10 years since then, he probably already forgotten such a stupid idea by now.”

“Did he?” Anna suddenly opened her mouth to speak, “But he still is willing to marry a witch.”

“Well, I’m sure he still remembers—wait,” Tilly opened her eyes wide, “you mean right now?”

“Yes,” she smiled lightly, “His Highness Roland said it himself.”

Tilly was suddenly frozen in place.

Chapter 365 – Westward

Petrov yawned, after getting up from the bed, his body immediately felt a cold chill. If possible, he wanted to remain in bed, not only because it was warm, but his partner Sheryl was also there.

“Aren’t you going to sleep a little more?” the woman turned over and whispered while still drowsy, “It is still very early, isn’t it?”

He leaned over and kissed her forehead—Sheryl, she had brown curly hair, skin as smooth as a baby, and a pair of big and cute eyes. The first time he met her was in Longsong Theater, and almost at first sight, he was captivated by her.

“It should be almost noon, I have to go downstairs and see if there is any business to deal with,” Petrov whispered, “If you don’t want to wake up yet, you can go back to sleep, I’ll have an attendant send lunch to the bedroom later.”

“But I want you to be here with me,” Sheryl stretched her arms and encircled them around his waist, “It is snowing outside anyway, what official business can be done now?”

That was about right, since the arrival of the Months of Demons, the whole city had quieted down, even the theater only opened once a week, all the merchants in the market had evacuated, and even the taverns were closed. If you were to walk in the streets during the day, you might think this was an abandoned city.

Then... should I just go back to sleep? After courting Sheryl for nearly a year, he had finally now gotten his wish, so he was a little reluctant to leave. Last night's pleasure time was exhausting, but now he was energetic again, so maybe lunch could wait, and they could go back to warming their bodies together a bit more.

At this moment, a knock was heard from outside the bedroom.

"Sir Petrov, a blue-skinned letter arrived."

He was startled, but then immediately got out of bed and picked up a robe which was lying on the ground, and as he draped it over his body he answered, "I'll be right there."

"Sir?" Sheryl said in a low voice.

"It will only take a moment," Petrov hurried to fasten his belt and left the room. After a moment, he returned inside and crawled into the bed, holding a letter with a blue cover on it in his hand.

"What is it, who wrote it?" the woman had basically already woken up by now, and she yawned as she sat beside Petrov.

"It's from Border Town," he replied, "It should have come directly from the prince."

After unwrapping the cover and pulling out the paper, he quickly swept through the contents of the letter, and furrowed his brow, "His Highness, he wants me to go to Border Town."

“Right now?” Sheryl said while surprised, “He wants you to go in this weather?”

“Well, it is probably something important,” Petrov sighed, “I’ll prepare my luggage and be ready to set off in the afternoon. You should go home first, I’ll see you when I get back.”

He couldn’t help but to remember that time one year ago, when he also sailed to Border Town despite the wind and snow, in order to bring Duke Ryan’s warning from Longsong Stronghold. And now, the reason he had to go to that barren land was because of a letter from that same small town’s feudal lord, this made Petrov sigh at the unexpected turns of fate.

“Can’t you pretend like you didn’t see it?” she said while unhappy, “He indeed captured Longsong Stronghold, but you are the de facto ruler of the stronghold, even if it were the king’s order, it doesn’t have to be done right now, right?”

If it were the duke, he might, but he knew the disposition of the fourth prince. He caressed her head and said, “It is not the same, the king cannot maintain control of the western region, but His Highness Roland can... He is not only Border Town’s feudal lord, but the master of the entire western region.”



After entering the Months of Demons, Longsong Stronghold did not have that much official business to deal with, so he just gave

some of the tasks to his subordinates, and had his father, Count Hull, assume personal command of the castle while he was gone.

Unlike the last time when he worked as an assistant, this time he would be riding the duke's special ship "Lionheart", carrying his retinue of more than 10 servants and apprentices, in addition to two knights sworn to him, it could be called rather excessive.

Across from the city's outer block, as he was heading to the fortress' wharf, a noise from near a corner attracted Petrov's attention.

He saw a little over 10 people around in a circle, seemingly observing something. By looking at them, they were probably civilians, and were likely from the neighborhood and were attracted by the noise. Inside the circle he could hear one or two people saying such things as "Devil!" "Hang her!" among other roars.

Petrov's mind was stirred, and he spoke to a knight near him, "Go and take a look, if it's an ordinary dispute, make them return to their houses."

"Yes, my lord."

The knight pushed through the surrounding crowd, and after walking to the middle he pulled out his sword, causing the crowd to soon disperse. He then brought back a woman and two children, one of which had a hemp rope coiled around her neck.

“What is going on?”

“My lord,” the woman prostrated at Petrov’s feet, “you must hurry and kill her! She has fallen and turned into a witch!”

These words slightly shocked him, “Witch?” he shifted his gaze to the two children, the tall boy immediately went in front of the girl, making a ferocious expression.

In his face, there were some purple bruises, making it apparent that he had been beaten up quite a bit, “She is not a Devil’s lackey, they even say it in the theater play, there are good and bad witches, what are you planning to do with her?”

“Are you sure she is a witch?” Petrov paid no attention to the boy and continued to ask the woman.

“Yes, my lord, do not be fooled by those people in the theater, if the Church was still here, they would not allow them to talk all that nonsense on the stage. This bastard is a little devil, I was just punishing her in place of the Church. My lord, hurry up and hang her, we should not allow the demonic aura to spread in the Longsong city!”

“Get to the point!” he yelled.

After the other party’s incessant babbling was over, Petrov finally found the root of this issue.

After the church was burned down by Timothy, she and some other believers suddenly organized, and continued to preach and pray in the outer city area, while waiting for the Holy City of Hermes to reassign a new priest and build a new church in the western region.

As for this situation, it was just a coincidence. She caught sight of the girl's ability while she was using it to remove the snow from the woman's roof. In her story, the woman also repeatedly complained about the absurdity of the content imparted by the elementary education, as well as the theater's performances. "The nearby onlookers only dared to catch the boy, but few were willing to hang this abominable devil, if it was before, her body would have already been hanging from the beams..." These words of hate cause Petrov's eyebrow to jump.

"Take her back, and do a thorough interrogation," he commanded the knight, "This time you'll have to stay in the stronghold, when I come back I want to see her and every believer related to her, detained in prison."

"What... No! My lord, how can you do something like—" the woman couldn't finish her word, her protest was stopped by the knight who slapped her around a few times.

"Are you really a witch?" afterwards, Petrov looked at the frightened little girl, "Show me."

The girl knelt down slowly without answering.

Petrov shook his head and raised his voice a little, “If you can prove yourself to be a real witch, I can let you go.”

After some time, the cowering girl placed both of her hands into a snowpile that was as thick as a palm and soon, the snow gradually turned into flowing water.

“That’s enough,” Petrov nodded, “come with me.”

“Come?” the little girl looked up, “Where to?”

“A place suitable for witches to live in.” he motioned an attendant to pick up the girl, and then they continued moving towards the pier.

“Put her down, you liar! You promised to let her go!” the boy wanted to get close, but he was blocked by several other servants, and his shouting gradually disappeared in the distance.

Chapter 366 – Paper

After the Months of Demons' snow started to fall, the Scarlet Water River was the only path to cross through the western region.

When compared with the small sailing boat he rode before, the "Lionheart" was much more spacious. It could even accommodate a simple kitchen, so even while traveling, you could also eat hot meals.

His bedroom was naturally a separate single room the duke had originally used, located at the stern, and similarly to the sea-sailing ships, you could watch through the window the flow of the river and the floating ice.

"My lord, here's the egg soup you requested." the knight delivered a jar and a porcelain bowl to his room.

"Thank you for your hard work," Petrov nodded as he said, "come sit down and drink a bowl too, it will warm you up."

Since His Highness, The Prince had detained all of the four great noble families' knights in Border Town, and denied them of the chance for redemption, the first thing the nobles did was to send those knights' household family members together with them. And after emptying their lands, they either tried to recruit new knights or simply ended up eating up their lands.

Only the Honeysuckle Household did not suffer too many losses

in the previous war, and instead, by taking advantage of it, their influence in Longsong Stronghold quickly grew. Now, they were comfortably bigger than the four great noble families, and also managed to have an entire knight unit. This knight, Seth, was a member of that unit, and although not as well-known as Morning Light, he could be considered a quite outstanding young knight.

“Yes,” he smiled, and after removing the lid on the jar, he poured some soup for Petrov, “But... my lord, is this really all right?”

“You refer to the witch?”

“Yes, although the church was burnt down, it would not be hard to build a new one. The Church will someday return to the western region, all you had to do was to push the blame onto the fourth prince, and they would not be able to object. But now you rescued a witch in front of people, and even arrested the Church’s believers...” the knight hesitated to continue, “this is equal to openly opposing the Church.”

“Since it is not that difficult to build another, why is it that the place is still in ruins?” Petrov blew over the egg soup, spreading the fragrant aroma, “the Church will not return to the western region again.”

Seth blinked, not fully convinced by that conclusion.

After waiting for the egg soup to cool down a little, he drank a bit of it and exhaled white vapor clouds with a satisfied expression, “As a substitute overseer, the most important quality is to

comprehend the true intentions of the person in charge. His Highness' educational policy in the stronghold, the introduction of the Border Town's recruit training program, the obviously staged theater plays, it is clear that with these, the influence of the Church will be weakened. I became the acting regent of the stronghold by the grace of His Highness, so it is only natural that I understand the ways he tries to govern the fortress, if I'm unable to even see this point, I'm afraid he would have already replaced me with someone else." Petrov shrugged his shoulders, "If it just to prevent the church building from being reconstructed—the stone masons and carpenters should have already received a notification to keep them from doing it, and even if the believers want to rebuild it themselves, the street mice would make it so they are unable to work."

"But the Church—"

"Since the prince has taken such actions, it means he is not afraid of the Church's retaliation, but even has the confidence to keep them away. So, if they can still set foot in the western region again, it would only mean that His Highness has failed. And if he is defeated, I would no longer be able to sit in the high seat of the stronghold's castle, I think this is something you should be able to understand."

"Do you believe the fourth prince can defeat the Church's army?" the surprised Seth asked.

"Who knows," Petrov shook his head as he smiled, "A year ago, nobody believed he could withstand Duke Ryan's knight group," he got up and grabbed the soup jar, "I'll go take a look at the little

girl, I'm sure she might be hungry."



The girl was called Paper.

No doubt only a homeless child would use such a random name.

Since boarding the ship, she had stayed in the cabin under the deck, not saying a word. Even if her fingers turned red from the cold, and her whole body shivered, she still didn't utter a single sound. As a measure of safety, Petrov made her wear a God Punishment Stone locket, after all, even though His Highness spread the words that witches and ordinary people were not different, he did not entirely believe that someone in possession of such incredible power would really be just like an ordinary person—even if it was an unintentional act, she was still likely to cause damage to themselves.

"Why don't you lie down on the quilt?" Petrov pointed at the hammock hanging inside the cabin—since the insides had a limited space, sailors usually slept in the swaying hammocks, and wrapped themselves with a hemp quilt, he couldn't say for sure how comfortable they were, but at least they served their purpose to keep you warm.

"It will get dirty." she answered in a low voice.

"Sailors are not any cleaner than you," he searched for a dry spot

and sat down, “This trip will take us three days, do you plan to sit there all that time? I’m afraid you will not last until Border Town, and will likely die on the way.”

“Border Town?” Paper said with a blank expression.

“Didn’t I tell you? I’ll take you to a place suitable for witches to live in.” Petrov opened the lid on the jar, “Come and eat up some hot soup, then go lie on the hammock.”

The girl did not object, he could tell she was starving since she picked up the jar and drank directly from it, seemingly not afraid of burning her tongue.

Petrov shook his head, her body was as thin as a monkey, the dirt had already stiffened her hair, the clothes she was wearing were probably picked up from somewhere and had several holes in them—looking at her appearance, it was no different from the numerous homeless children in the stronghold.

“Who was that boy who tried to protect you?” he asked, “A homeless friend of yours?”

“Snake Tooth, he... often brings us... something to eat.” Paper swallowed the broth and stuck out her tongue, speaking incoherently, “So, as long as I follow you along, you... won’t catch him, right? He... is not a witch.”

“Of course,” Petrov’s face showed no expression, “he is of no

importance.” The phrase ‘often bringing something to eat’ surprised him slightly, there were very few people like that in the slums, since the lack of food often caused them to rob each other—when they were not even sure they would survive, they obviously would not be in the mood to care for other people. And the name Snake Tooth... it sounded quite a bit like one a street mouse would use.

Thinking up to here, he couldn’t help asking, “A moment ago you said ‘us’—is there another witch besides you?”

“No,” Paper shook her head, “they all are just orphans from nearby.”

This made Petrov slightly relieved, “Didn’t that old swindler say you used your ability to remove the snow? It was the first time I saw a witch dare to use her abilities in front of many people.”

“It was proposed by Snake Tooth, he said I could help the residents by quickly removing the snow from their roofs, in exchange for some food, and with that, fill everyone’s stomach. The theater plays the story of the witch all day, so now people are not afraid of witches, so as long as I was willing to work hard, he would go mediate with those adults for a deal.”

So that was it, Petrov couldn’t keep the corners of his mouth from rising, this guy is very interesting, he knew how to make use of the resources he had at hand, but he underestimated the influence the Church still had, “Did you get anything to eat?”

“Yes...” Paper lowered her head, “I swept three roofs, at one they just kicked me out, the other two gave me half a loaf of bread, and a piece of wheat pancake. However, at the fourth house...”

She ran into that hatred-filled woman, Petrov patted her head in pity and said, “Have a good rest after you are done, when it is time for dinner, I will send someone to inform you.”

Three days later, Lionheart arrived at the wharf in Border Town.

Chapter 367 – The First Step Towards Building A City

As Petrov walked out of the cabin, his nose didn't perceive the smell of rotten wood one would expect, the trestle at the side of the ship was obviously new, but the old wharf had been expanded to twice its former size, and walking over it no longer made a squeaky sound. Stepping on the pier gave out a reassuring sound—apparently the joints between the planks were very reliable, and the materials were also rather thick.

Immediately after leaving the boat and walking down the docks, several uniformed guards came over. The man at the front observed the emblem hanging from the Lionheart's mast and said, "May I ask who you are? Are you Lord Hull of the Honeysuckle family?"

"Yes," Petrov nodded in acknowledgement, receiving such inquiries filled him with joy, "I am Petrov Hull, I came here by the request of His Highness."

"Sir Iron Axe has already informed us, follow us, please," the guard made a gesture with his hand.

"On foot?" He was slightly startled.

"Yes, the stables have been dismantled," the guard was a little embarrassed and answered while smiling, "Rest assured, the town's road is in good shape."

Petrov soon understood what the guard meant by saying “good shape”.

The dark-colored streets were flat and wide, there was no snow over the road, and neither did it have much water on it—the paving seemed to be formed by many black stones, with small gaps in between them, that after being soaked in water, gave out a clean and smooth appearance. And to his surprise, there was more than one road, every other hundred steps he could see a straight fork, forming neat squares and making the town have a high degree of organization. Even after walking for fifteen minutes, he could not see a spot where the road was muddy.

Petrov was amazed at the discovery of the town not resembling the one in his memory.

“My lord, is this really... Border Town?” Seth had his eyes wide open as he looked around, “Didn’t you say this was only a makeshift residence put in place in order to work at the mine?”

“That was true before,” the guard answered with a smile, “but ever since His Highness came, everything started to change. Like the roads in the town, the construction started six months ago, and required a thousand people busily working every day, finishing almost a road a month.”

Petrov noticed an undisguised pride in his tone, making it obvious he was feeling proud to be a member of this town.

However... this was simply unbelievable! On both sides of the street there were trees arranged evenly, making him imagine a scene in the summer season, with the lush foliage casting its shadow and sheltering the people from the scorching sun. Then there were the houses—the small mud houses and shabby wooden shacks had disappeared, and instead were replaced by sharp-cornered brick houses, each one being two or three stories high, each designed almost identically, making it obvious that the same group of stonemasons worked together on these buildings.

In only one year, how could he turn that old barren town into this?

With both surprise and confusion, Petrov followed the guard into the castle area, after arriving, the guide was replaced by a knight that was donning armor. He left his attendants outside the walls as he proceeded.

When he set foot in the lord's castle, Petrov found himself having similar feelings to which he had a year ago.

Nothing seems to have changed much in here, comparing it with the duke's castle in the stronghold, the prince's castle is obviously smaller in size.

The knight pushed open the door of the reception room, and made a gesture as if inviting him to go inside, then he soon saw the figure of the prince, sitting at the main seat of the table.

His Highness Roland Wimbledon.

“Welcome to Border Town,” Roland said while smiling, “Mister Ambassador.”

There seemed to be no change in His Highness, this gave Petrov an inexplicable peace of mind. He raised his hand to touch his chest, and respectfully saluted, “The Honeysuckle Household pays respects to you, Your Highness.”

“Sit down,” Roland nodded, “I asked you to come here because of a very important matter. This issue concerns the future of the western region, and naturally, it also includes Longsong Stronghold.”

“Please, continue.”

“I plan on establishing a city here, it will range from the Concealing Forest to the west, to Longsong Stronghold at the east, and it will include half of the western region. By that time, the stronghold will act as a fortress east of the new city, and it will be the first line of defense against the Church’s army, rather than acting as an independent city as it has been up until now.” Roland methodically explained, “In this vast territory, the same laws will have to be implemented and abided by, and it will be unified under the management of a new city hall. Therefore, no nobles will be able to meddle in the affairs of the city, the five big noble families of the western border will be no exception.”

Petrov felt his heart shaking fiercely! A year ago, he also had the idea that Duke Ryan would move the defensive line against the

demonic beasts to Border Town, allowing him to use the land in between at the same time. But unexpectedly, a year later, the prince would also adopt this method, and he's being more thorough than what he imagined. But turning Longsong Stronghold into part of the city? Just by imagining it, he could understand that the scale of the city would be astonishing!

He unconsciously tried to raise a question, but before he could articulate the words, they were swallowed back—since he spoke about it himself, there was no doubt the decision had already been made, and nobody could prevent him from carrying out the plan now.

Petrov never thought of going against the prince... Duke Ryan's fateful defeat had left a deep impression on him, making him believe that this grey-haired man could never be defeated, at least... he himself could never achieve it. The only thing he could do now, was to seek his own interests amid these great changes.

“You said, the five noble families would not intervene in the affairs of the city, then how will the Honeysuckle household be of use for you?”

The prince was silent for a while, and as he saw Petrov showing a slight uneasy expression, he chuckled, “You really surprise me, Mister Ambassador, whether it was the time I offered you to surrender Longsong Stronghold, or the positive attitude you just showed me, it is rare for nobility to make such wise decisions.” After saying this, he restrained his smile and said in a serious tone, “As long as the Honeysuckle household is willing to accept my rule, you can continue to assist me in the management of the Longsong

area.”

“Either me or my father, we will always comply with your will—”

“I’m not talking about individuals, but the territory.” Roland interrupted him, “Henceforth, it is to accept it as me offering shelter to the nobles, only conceding ownership over the territory, but no government rights over it—whether be it the law, the enforcement of it, or any other policies and regulations, they will be subjected to the decrees promulgated by the city hall.”

“Such...” Petrov hesitated to speak.

“The territory will be able to be inherited by generation, just like a knighthood, your family will also be able to run farmlands, workshops, or other businesses. These industries, together with the land, will belong only to the Honeysuckle family, and others won’t be able to meddle in them—this will be a gift granted by me. Apart from the government rights, the land you own will not have any change, and even under the stimulus of the new policy, it will only grow more prosperous.” the prince continued, “Of course, you can also choose to return to your own territory, and live like a traditional noble. However, when I complete the establishment of the new city, and start expanding outwards, the occupied areas will cease to belong to their original owners.”

Chapter 368 – Filling In The Gaps

“Do you think he will agree?” Nightingale asked next to his ear after Petrov left.

“I do not know, and the promise he did say is not that useful, he has to persuade his father, Count Hull, first,” Roland took a sip of his hot tea, “If despite everything, he still intends to be a fief lord, it would only be a pity.”

“But you’re not going to let him just leave, are you?” she jokingly said.

“Of course not,” the corner of Roland’s lips curled upwards, “As a noble person he was never pompous, and he has always tried grasping opportunities. In business and trade he was also exceptionally good, so as long as he has practiced a year in Longsong Stronghold, I was sure he would become an excellent official who could single handedly take care of issues.”

“If he manages to persuade Count Hull, are you really going to leave the management of King’s City to him?”

“If I unify Greycastle Kingdom, the kingdom’s capital will naturally have to be moved... And for a city that is far from the western region, it is best to leave its management to someone who was dispatched from the west, so the pledge that I did was not only empty words.” Roland, later in the conversation, disclosed to Petrov that from that point onwards, no land would be given to any nobility, and after the consolidation of Greycastle, the entire

ruling system of the kingdom will be based on a new model. Together with the enforcement of the law, policies, and regulations, all the power and authority would be centralized. If he decided to stay, Longsong Stronghold wouldn't be the peak of his political career, and being in charge of a big city, or becoming a chief bureaucrat of the central administrative committee, was not impossible.

As to what he could achieve, it would be up to his own ability.

Roland could only hope that Petrov would be able to understand the expectations of him placed in his remarks.

“Well, in any case, I don't really get it,” Nightingale patted him on the shoulder, “but the new witch is coming soon, so it would be better if you could leave for a while.”

“Are you going to question her alone?”

“I will call Wendy over,” she answered next to him, then smiled as she continued, “She is better at these things, compared to me.”

For security reasons, the Witch Union (which was mainly Scroll's proposal), when accepting a foreign witch, would have her identity confirmed first by Nightingale's ability. Because in order for her to identify the lies, the God Punishment Stone locket had to be removed, by not having Roland present, it lowered the chances of a witch going ahead and attacking, causing an incident.

Scroll even came up with ten common questions in order to confirm identities, for example, ‘Where do you come from?’, ‘What’s your real name?’, ‘Do you know the prince?’, ‘Are you hostile towards the prince?’, etc. Considering that Nightingale’s power could only tell whether someone thought they were telling truth or a lie, if they sincerely believed that they were telling the truth even though it was in fact a lie, then that would defeat her power, so these questions were made so they would inquire from every point, leaving no blind spot. Even if you could find a way around one or two of them, it was impossible to reply to all of them in detail if you were lying.

Roland himself found this both funny and embarrassing, but considering this a gesture of kindness from the witches, he just went along with them.



After leaving the reception room, he went back to his office and immediately called for the city hall’s Chief Minister Barov.

Petrov’s report about the discovery of a new witch in Longsong Stronghold, made him realize his own negligence. Although he awarded Nana a decoration in the stage he set, therefore officially declaring the existence of witches in Border Town, he had not prepared a policy or statement to directly explain the treatment and status that the witches would receive. So maybe Border Town may also have a situation like the Stronghold—where a witch who has awakened to her powers, would still choose to hide her identity, instead of actively taking the initiative to stand out.

After Barov crossed the doorway, Roland immediately said, “I’m going to issue a long-term recruitment announcement, its contents will be those drafted in this paper.”

He received the draft and after taking a quick glance at the document said, “You... will recruit witches at a monthly salary of a gold royal?”

“Yes,” Roland nodded and continued, “this is also the standard salary in the Witch Union.” In this time and age, a salary of gold royals was without doubt one only the top positions would get, the wages in Border Town were generally higher than those of other cities, even the highest paid job in the acid manufacturing factory had climbed up to 20 silver royals, but even then, a witch received five times that amount.

This recruiting notice not only showed the witches’ treatment, but also served to confirm their status.

“Since your goal is to get more witches, why not have people look for them?” Barov asked, “Like when you used the citizens to report on possible spies, they have the sharpest eyes after all.”

Now even Mister Chief Minister has learned the tricks of the ‘vast sea of the people’s war’. The prince kept a neutral face, but was happy from the bottom of his heart, and after waving his hand he said, “Then, won’t I have to pay them a bonus too? Isn’t that the same trick the Church uses?”

“But... it will be in order to attract witches, not to hang them.”

“Although that’s the idea, the witches exposed by the people might think that I’m forcing them, and although those who have recently awakened to their powers this past year had not suffered from persecution, this cannot be compared with the situation of those outside of Border Town,” Roland openly stated, “I want them to come up voluntarily, and contribute to Border Town with their strength.”

Aside from the witches’ personal preference, what he was more worried about was that, if a decree declared that those who found a witch would be rewarded, or those who gave birth to a witch would receive a prize, it would likely cause a wave of “whistleblowers”, or maybe they will regard giving birth to a witch as a “business”. But hard work is better than having a witch, although in the short-term, this could dramatically reverse the witches’ position, in the long-term, this type of policy would have a negative impact on the slogan “Hard work leads to wealth” from Border Town’s propaganda. Therefore, by simply aiming for the witches’ recruitment, this situation would effectively be avoided.

Barov just bowed and went back, afterwards Wendy came in to hand over the results of the new witch’s questioning and placed them on the table, “Your Highness, I have confirmed her identity, it is basically the same as what the Honeysuckle’s eldest son said, there is no problem.”

“See?” Roland said with a smile, “You were too cautious.”

“But this level of prudence is necessary,” Wendy insisted in saying, “your personal safety is the matter of utmost importance,

so we need to make sure.”

“Alright,” he was feeling a little touched, and after taking a deep breath he said, “Then, bring her in.”

The girl was about fifteen or sixteen years old, she had dirty dark-brown hair, and her eyes revealed some timidity and restlessness. This was probably the first time she had walked into a carpeted room, so she looked around in panic, without really knowing what to do.

According to what was written in the document, she called herself Paper, and was born on the outskirts of Longsong Stronghold. She became an orphan after a heavy snowfall three years ago, which was kind of a similar experience most of the western region’s homeless children had gone through. They would either die while scavenging for food, or would join the underground street mice, becoming either a thief, a goon or a scapegoat.

“You...” Roland couldn’t think of anything good to say for a moment. She didn’t have the ability to adapt like Agatha, nor was she strong-minded like Anna, and even Mystery Moon and Lily, they had companions and sisters in the Cooperation Association before. As a young girl in a new and strange place, she was probably still in a state of panic, so he was afraid it would take some time before she could get used to this new lifestyle. And from the report Petrov gave him, her ability to quickly melt the snow was most likely related to temperature.

In any case, there is no hurry to test her ability, after she feels

more comfortable I can slowly comprehend it. Thinking up to here, he turned to look at Wendy and said, “The long voyage should have exhausted her, lead her to take a shower, then have her take a good rest. Her housing should be arranged in the witches’ building, and as for magic-related matters, I leave it to you to teach her anything needing attention, okay?”

“Of course,” she smiled, “as you wish.”

Chapter 369 – Change

The bathhouse pool inside the bathroom was filled with hot and steamy water.

Wendy moistened the soap and with it, she washed over the little girl's body, her ears, armpits, even her fingers, leaving no place spared. As she saw the smudge and dirt slipping along the soap's foam, exposing the little girl's delicate skin underneath, she felt a unique satisfaction.

This was a feeling she had not experienced for a long time. When she joined the Cooperation Association and became a fugitive, every new witch that joined was frightened, or had fallen into despair, so the task of calming them down fell to her, to ignite the flame of hope inside them, so that they could long for a better life. That had happened with Leaf, same with Lily, and even Nightingale... But after they came to Border Town, the witches' life had changed drastically, there was no longer the need for anyone to worry about their survival—although she did not think this was a bad outcome, and was very grateful to Roland for everything he had done for all the sisters, even causing Mystery Moon to become a more cheerful person, but without any witch needing to be looked after, Wendy felt slightly lost.

Now, she had finally revived that joy of playing the role of a big sister.

“Close your eyes, I'm going to pour water.”

“Ok,” the girl’s voice was gracious and soft, like a drop of water dripping from a blade of grass.

I’ll have to give him credit, His Highness’ decision was perfect.

The water ran across the girl’s hair, and down over her back, taking with it the bubbles that had turned into a greyish-brown foam. It was after rinsing three times, that the color of the water returned to normal.

Without the cover of her clothes, her fragile body was fully reflected in Wendy’s eyes. What a skinny child, Wendy couldn’t help to think, Her spine can be clearly seen in her back, her arms are so thin I could wrap my hand around them, and her skin is not white like paper, it shows a yellowish tone, probably caused by the long starvation she had suffered. The name Paper is completely inconsistent with her appearance.

But luckily, she was a witch, so as long as she was nursed back to health, it wouldn’t take long before she returned back to normal.

After her body was thoroughly washed clean, next was the pleasant bathhouse pool soaking time. After Wendy confirmed the water’s temperature, she carried her into the tub, and the two of them were swallowed by the slightly hot water, but as long as they endured the initial discomfort of the hot water, the feeling of warmth would quickly turn into feelings of happiness.

Inside the bathhouse pool, Paper couldn’t help but letting out a moaning sound, it probably had been a long time since the last

time she had taken a hot bath, and after tightly holding Wendy, the girl gradually loosened up. Wendy turned the girl the other way around, letting her rest in her bosom, carefully parting her hair which was already scrunched up.

“When did you discover that you had become a witch?”

“Two... years ago,” Paper replied in a low voice, “I believe it was also in the winter.”

“That’s not surprising,” Wendy said and smiled, “most witches will awaken in the Months of Demons, it is said to be the most magic-abundant days of the year.”

“It is not because of the power of the devil?”

“Of course not,” she patted Paper on the head and continued, “Being a witch is a very, very normal matter, apart from having the ability to perform incredible deeds, we are not that much different from ordinary people. Did you know? Hundreds of years ago, the witches were regarded as being loved by the gods.”

“Really?”

“It’s true.”

In fact, the differences are quite large, such as the the overall improvement of the body, the physical appearance, and the inability to give birth to descendants, Wendy thought, but these

can be taught slowly in the future.

“Uhh... what is magic?” Paper timidly asked.

“A natural form of power, like the radiance emitted by the sun that reaches everywhere,” Wendy expressed her thoughts, “Well, not quite like that, the sun sets at times, but magic is always there. In other words, you can think of it as a part of your body, and is a part that is always growing.”

“Always growing?”

“Yes, as you grow older, your magic will also grow stronger, so in order to accommodate that, you need to improve your body’s ability to withstand it, otherwise there will be a backlash.” she carefully explained, “The Church is just taking advantage of this fact, spreading lies that witches are swallowed by the evil demonic power, which couldn’t be more wrong. All you need to do is keep practicing your ability in order to increase your magic capacity, so that there won’t be the need to worry about it affecting your body. If you awoke as a witch two years ago, you should have experienced your first day of awakening already, it must have been very painful... that time.”

The little girl just nodded her head lightly.

“Rest assured, now that you are in Border Town, everything will only get better,” Wendy spoke softly, trying to comfort her, “if you start practicing soon, this year’s day of awakening should be easy to pass through.”

Just as she was speaking, the bathroom door was suddenly pushed open, and Lily came running in with a towel in hand, “I heard a new sister arrived? Where is she? Mystery Moon said she would love to see her!”

“It is clearly you that is the one eager to see her!” said Mystery Moon as she went inside the bathroom, giving her a condescending look, “now let’s hurry to bathe, I might have to practice my abilities in the afternoon.”

“Don’t worry, it would be fine if you relax for one day, His Highness won’t come troubling you, you’re not Miss Anna after all.”

“...You traitor!”

As Paper saw the two people barge in, she immediately sunk herself, submerging her body inside the water.

“Oh, is she the new witch?” Lily approached and then lay at the side of the tub, looking at Paper with great interest, “You look as big as me, but don’t worry, you can still call me elder sister.”

“What’s with you calling yourself elder sister?” Mystery Moon raised her voice, “You have never called me that.”

“They both are witches from Border Town,” Wendy introduced them with a smile, “despite how they look like now, when we first

arrived here, they were pretty much the same as you... especially Mystery Moon, she wasn't any braver than you, and her speech was also very soft-spoken."

Cough, cough, "I was afraid that His Highness would be disappointed by how weak my ability was." Mystery Moon mumbled.

"His Highness has already told me many times, he said that your power has enormous potential," Wendy slightly shook her head, "and as long as you complete 《Elementary Physics》, your ability might evolve beyond your imagination."

"Leaving the books aside, she didn't even understand the words entirely, but since she barely passed the test last time," Lily shrugged, "I'll make sure to teach her in the evening. If we wait until you learn all the weird formulas in the books, maybe at that time, His Highness Roland might have unified Greycastle already, and would no longer need your help as a witch." Ignoring Mystery Moon, who had both her brows furrowed, she turned to the girl at the bosom of Wendy and asked, "By the way, what is Paper's ability?"

"...Letting snow melt." The little girl hesitated before answering.

"And what else?" Lilly asked with curiosity, "Can you make the melted water turn back into ice?"

"No," Paper replied quietly, "but also... I can also turn hot water into cold water."

“So, it is some sort of temperature control?” Wendy pondered, “But making snow melt is a temperature increase, and having the hot water cool down is a temperature decrease, if you can’t do the opposite, then your power doesn’t seem like temperature control. Have you only tried using your ability on water?”

“With other things, the change is not that big.”

“Try it with this,” Lily carried over the basin filled with soapy water that she was using to wash herself.

The girl cautiously placed her hand inside the basin, and soon, the steaming water cooled down. But then, in front of the crowd’s eyes, the blurry soapy water had a peculiar change, the floating bubbles gradually vanished, turning into white particles that welled up and also eventually disappeared, leaving behind a basin filled with clear and transparent water.

Chapter 370 – Rhythm

Three days later, Roland received a positive reply from the Honeysuckle's eldest son.

“I am willing to continue serving you, and so will the Honeysuckle Household,” he bowed and said, “I will definitely persuade my father, he, compared to other nobles... is different.”

“Good,” Roland's mood immediately improved, “That would be for the best.”

“These past few days, I've seen the amazing changes your territory has gone through... It is likely, that the city will be like something from my dreams,” Petrov said bluntly, “If it can make the Honeysuckle family this prosperous, Father would not mind our family working together on the new city.”

These words made the prince feel slightly touched, because there were only two reasons he called for Petrov: One was that it seemed more appropriate to have a face-to-face meeting in spite of such major events, and the other point was to observe his attitude towards the new policies, he didn't expect that it would play out this way. He nodded, “Of course, as long as there is time, every piece of land in Greycastle can become a comfortable and prosperous place for the people.”

“Then, I will set off as soon as possible and return to the Stronghold, I need to tell Father the news.”

“Also to the other four Great Noble Families, as well as all the nobles of the western region,” Roland added, “Any family that is willing to accept these conditions, will be forgiven of any past animosity towards Border Town in the new city. You can hold a grand feast in the Stronghold’s castle, and use the opportunity to spread my words.”

“You mean, you want me to inform them?” Petrov was startled.

“Obviously,” the prince smiled and then continued, “This time... you really will serve as my ambassador.”

“By your will, Your Highness,” the Honeysuckle’s eldest son saluted with a hand on his chest.

Just as Petrov was preparing to leave, Roland stopped him and said, “Oh, right, regarding the case of the witch, what you did was a great job, you no longer need to cover it up. The universal education had its chance to open the mind and change the views of the people, so those who are still obsessed with the Church’s beliefs have no place in the western region. About how to exactly accomplish this, I’ll let you decide for yourself.”

“Yes.”

After Petrov Hull excused himself, Roland stretched his body as he continued to look at the city hall’s statistics on the new projects’ overview. Affected by the heavy snow, the work on the main road had long been suspended, the construction of the residential buildings also slowed down, so basically, the only works being

carried out were small indoor improvement jobs. Fortunately, the large number of earthen dwellings Lotus had built before leaving, had practically met the needs of the new refugees, and even if their numbers continued to increase, he only needed to allocate more people in each dwelling—this was a merit of those cave-like houses.

According to the Ministry of Construction, at least 60% of the workforce was currently in an idle state, this caused some of the most recent temporary recruitment notices issued by the city hall to become popular, for example, removing the snow from the streets, transporting ore to the blast furnace area, and so on.

In other cities, it was inconceivable that this many people were enthusiastic about doing work during the Months of Demons, knowing that winter was the hardest season for them, most of the citizens just stayed at home, and it was an unspoken rule to live on the food that they saved in autumn. However, in the eyes of Roland, watching so much of the workforce being idle always felt unsatisfying, so maybe, by coming up with new projects, he could make good use of them.

After all, Margaret of the Chamber of Commerce had bought out the last batch of steam engines produced this year, so the city hall had plenty of money and food, giving him the chance to start implementing new plans.

Having thought up to this point, Roland called the guard and had him summon the minister of construction, Karl van Bate.

After he declared his plans, Karl couldn't help but to stare with

his eyes wide open, “You want to employ the masons and clay craftsmen to build ships for you?”

Roland nodded, and in a serious tone he continued, “Yes, the location will be near the wharf, I want them to set up a temporary yard with wood, and inside I want them to place braziers to ensure a stable temperature. Have them set everything in a way so that after construction, the ship can be pushed directly into the water.”

“But, my lord, how could they possibly know how to build a ship?”

“Of course, the same way they built the witches’ housing,” Roland pulled out a piece of paper, and while pointing at the diagram said, “Erect the supporting guides, lay the steel bars, pour concrete into this... For the first ship, I’ll instruct you through the process, but you will be responsible for supervising the ships built after that. This way we can make use of all the idle workers.”

Karl stared at the schematic with a doubtful gaze, “Is this... a basin?”

The prince couldn’t help turning the corners of his mouth upwards, “Yes, a huge concrete basin.”

Since Karl had not participated in the construction of the Little Town, it was not surprising he viewed the diagram with those kind of eyes. In fact, in the long process of the development of ships of his last life, ships had undergone several morphological changes across the ages, so the inherited characteristics were scarce. In

truth, Roland wanted to design a classic boat with a keel, yet he obviously didn't know where to begin with, but there was no difference in building a cement boat and just 'modelling' one like clay, so long as it stayed afloat.

Steel boats were the same, due to the advancement of welding technology, most of the modern hulls had abandoned the process of laying down a keel, and instead chose to have steel squared sections joined together, spreading the overall stress across the floor. So there was really no need to master the crafting techniques of wooden shipbuilding beforehand.

And about the new fleet of cement boats, he had been thinking about it for a long time—whether if it was to exploit resources like coal in the mines near the snowy mountain, or to transport refugees, he would need numerous high-capacity river vessels to carry out those tasks, therefore, a flat hull design was the most suitable choice. Comparing it with the conservative design of the Little Town, the hull of the new ships could be longer, allowing for an increased speed while at the same time ensuring a bigger load and greater stability.

And to lower the difficulty of their construction, Roland finally decided to use a paddle wheel as a propulsion mechanism. This had already been done in the wooden boats, so it was easier for the craftsmen to get started on it.

“Your Highness, how many people are you going to employ in the construction of this... cement boat?” Karl asked in a bit of an awkward tone.

“Bring all of the idle workers over, like they did with the houses, they can start working on several ships at the same time.” This way, even if the new assembled steam engines from the factory do not sell out, they can become useful, Roland thought to himself, Also, the furnace area can continue to produce cement, so this endeavor serves multiple purposes. And when next year arrives, if I can have a large cement fleet, no matter where the First Army has to be dispatched, they would have a reliable logistical support.

After concluding this matter, Roland planned to go take a look at the back garden of the castle.

The olive trees and vines planted by Leaf provided shelter from the snow, so if they did not have a job at hand, the witches were generally practicing in the garden, and the newly arrived Paper should be no exception.

After listening to Wendy’s report, he noticed that her ability was not a sort of temperature regulation, nor was it likely that it was able to return materials back to their original state either. Besides, apart from water, the effect her ability had on other objects was very little. This made Roland feel rather curious about her ability. Now that three days had passed, the little girl should not be as timid with strangers as she was when she had just arrived, he decided to go and personally observe.

Just as he entered the garden area, Roland realized there was something strange.

He was welcomed by a green and exuberant sight, as if this place was completely isolated from the white outside world—the olive

trees were evergreen, and among their branches there were winding vines, it wasn't really strange that the fluttering snowflakes couldn't get inside, but these plants were simply just too vibrant. And unlike a silent forest, there was no wind blowing, yet the plants were gently swaying, elegantly and filled with rhythm.

He believed this might be an illusion, but as he thought this, he saw the branches of the olive tree dropping down, as if to bow down to express its regards, and the blades of grass at his feet also inclined to the side, as if to greet his arrival.

This feeling slightly frightened Roland, giving him goosebumps on his back, I feel like I'm not walking in the garden, but inside the body of a gigantic creature.

The entire garden felt alive, as if it were breathing.

Chapter 371 – Heart Of The Forest

As Roland walked to the center of the garden, he couldn't help but to stare at it.

At the end of the garden's passageway, a small room built entirely out of plants welcomed him, the trees' trunks and the enhanced crops formed up the walls, the vines hung overhead, spread in a crisscross pattern as if being carefully woven by someone, and among their green leaves, the glittering grapes hung in bundles.

A bonfire was burning in the middle of the room, surrounded by furniture that had a tone of green—but on a closer look, that furniture was made up entirely out of strange plants that stretched out from the ground.

For a moment, he thought he had arrived in a world straight out of a fairy tale, and if not for the several familiar figures standing on the side of the bonfire, he really would have wondered if this was indeed a dream.

“What is going on?”

Tilly turned back, and with a look of admiration she said, “Leaf's ability has evolved, she transformed into this garden.”

“But, where is she?” Roland was shocked.

“She has merged herself with the plants,” Tilly looked around, “In the sight before you, everything you see is a part of Leaf.”

The feeling that I was walking inside of a giant creature was not just an illusion, but when the “giant creature” was found out to be Leaf, Roland suddenly felt nervous, “Will she be able to recover?”

“As long as the ability is released, I’ll return back to normal,” the sound of Leaf’s words was suddenly heard. But after listening to it carefully, it was not like she was speaking with her voice, but instead it was more like the rustling of the leaves, and the branches grinding against each other that made that sound.

Leaf’s answer apparently calmed Roland down a little, then he asked, “Can you hear us?”

“Not only can I hear, but I can also see, smell, touch...” Leaf seemed to be very cheerful, “I can feel any small change occurring in the garden, including the nesting birds on the branches, the worms crawling inside the trees’ trunks... it is a feeling difficult to describe with words, but what Miss Tilly said is correct, I have become the garden itself, and I noticed your arrival from the moment you set foot in it.”

Just as she said this, a giant curled leaf came down from the ceiling onto Roland’s hand, and after slowly rolling open, a small cup with purple-red liquid was revealed. The cup was formed by four overlapping olive leaves, with the petiole as the ear of the cup, giving off a stylish and nifty look.

Roland grabbed it and placed it on his lips, taking a sip from it, discovering that this was a freshly-made wine, and with an acidity that gave off a refreshing sweetness. It appeared that both the wine and the container, came out from this garden.

After Roland finished Leaf's "proposed toast", he approached the campfire and as he observed the plant sofa-like bench with great interest, he sat on it—it was composed of interweaved branches with thick bark, the seat and back cushions were made out of broad wheat heads with grains in them, and after sitting on it, it felt very similar to a normal couch. At the side of the campfire stood several barbecue skewers, and Andrea was baking some apples and corn for everyone. Without a doubt, those too, were food provided by the garden.

"How did you accomplish all this?" the prince raised his head and asked.

"I'm not quite sure about the process," the sound of the voice quickly answered, "All I did was take care of the new plants and the messenger birds as usual, and by studying and practicing my abilities—they suddenly answered to my call. Perhaps this was the path that I was searching for, truly making the forest and the life it breeds into a coherent one."

"What if you were to exert your power over the Concealing Forest? Can you make it become a part of you?"

"I think... it is not likely," she hesitated for a moment, "And even if I could, it is possible that it would take a long time. It doesn't take that much magic to maintain this state, and even then, the

woods can replenish it for me, but every time I extend my area of control, it makes my thinking feels slow.”

“Your thinking feels slow?” Roland stared blankly after saying these words.

“I don’t know how to describe this feeling,” Leaf said, “If I slowly expand the land under my control, after a few years, I should be able to become one with the Concealing Forest. But if I try an instant merge, I’m afraid I might lose my mind—the first time I fused with the garden, I had this feeling that my brain was not enough, as if my mind suddenly expanded dramatically, and I had to accustom myself for a long time before I was able to return to normal.” She paused for a moment, then added, “But on the plants that have already been controlled once, if I enter them again I don’t have that unfamiliar feeling, so as long as I have time to practice, I believe your idea can be achieved.”

Indeed, it is amazing, Roland thought to himself, Anna and Lily moved towards a micro-oriented evolution, but Leaf’s new ability is clearly a breakthrough in a macro-oriented direction. If she’s able to take control over the whole Concealing Forest one day, there is no doubt that any movements from the enemy will never escape her eyes and ears.

“Congratulations,” Wendy smiled, “Now the Witch Union has another evolved witch, and according to what Agatha said, this is equal to the scale of half of the Federation.”

“If she were here, she would be lamenting it for a while,” Roland laughed, then looked towards the little girl who was stealing

curious glances at him, “And what about Paper?”

“About her ability... I’m afraid we still need further testing,” Wendy replied truthfully, “I found a strange phenomenon.”

As she said that, after a snap of her fingers, two packs of snow fell from the roof.

Wendy separated them both, placing one pack of snow besides the campfire, and the other was placed in a corner of the room, then she had paper make use of her ability, “I’m instructing her on how to use magic evenly, to stabilize her ability in order to exert its effect—like you originally taught me to. Right now, she doesn’t have a precise control, but in general, she’s getting there.”

Roland noticed that the snow near the bonfire quickly turned into a puddle of cold water, but the snow that was farther away only melted half way.

Wendy carried the melted water and walked towards the wall, after knocking on it, the tightly wrapped vines contracted to the sides, revealing a hole the size of a fist, and allowing for the cold wind quickly pour in.

“Now come, and use your ability on this,” she said to Paper.

The girl nodded, and after reaching out her hands, Roland was surprised to find that the cold water contained in the leaf-made cup had a thin layer of ice crystals over it.

“Is this... time acceleration, to make the results happen faster than they should? As soon as these words left his mouth, he immediately rejected that conjecture, That’s not it, time is just a concept that human beings set up out of convenience, and it, on itself does not exist. So, as a non-existing thing, how can you affect it?

“I began to think the same way, but Lady Tilly said that it was not the case,” Wendy attached a stone to a vine and as it hung, she slightly swayed it in front of Paper. The young witch used her ability once more, but the speed of the pendulum did not change, it just continued swinging, slowly decreasing its scope, until it finally stopped. “If it was time acceleration, the stone should swing faster, right?”

Indeed, Roland soon realized the nature of this girl’s ability—she was not affecting time, she affected the motion of the water molecules. Her magic changed the energy levels of the molecules, making it lower or higher, which on a broader scale means freezing or melting. It is likely that Paper herself may not understand any of this at all, so she’s only using her ability based on her feelings, that’s why the effect on other objects is small: Oxidation, for example, is a long process, it takes much longer to observe the results.

If he was actually right, her ability was surprisingly a perfect catalyst.

Chapter 372 – Leisure Time

A week later, Border Town received the last month of autumn with a heavy snowfall.

As Roland walked towards the window to observe the sight outside the office, he could see contrasting figures over the white and snowy roofs moving busily—it was a work that the townspeople needed to do every day, shovel the snow from the rooftops, in order to avoid it crushing them down.

To this date, it had been one full year since he came to this world, this time it is extremely cold compared to last year's autumn, and from here, last year's view was not so crowded with all those orderly-placed houses.

It was no surprise that there was talk about the town being abandoned back then. Surrounding the public plaza, there were some round, seemingly presentable cabins, but further out, they were all houses practically in ruins and thatched huts. The residences of the nobles were also mostly concentrated in the plaza area, and the only stone road was the one leading from the plaza to the castle, aside from those locations, the rest of the town was not really located in flat ground per se, and excrement from either people or animals could be seen everywhere.

But now, all the roads were transformed into secure ones resistant to water—even without a layer covering them, the roads were firm and had a very good quality. These dark lines divided the silvery-white town into squares of different sizes; The sides of the wide main road were planned to be used as a business district

in the future, with a residential area in its outskirts.

Adding to that, Border Town's industry had gradually began to take form, or more accurately, the workshop's production finally achieved a self-sustaining manufacturing line—of course, this was only limited to the steam engine so far. The blast furnace area can produce enough iron ingots to satisfy the manufacturing needs, while in the steam engine factory, they can be processed into parts and components.

The blacksmiths were no longer a stranger to all the new kinds of machinery tools, which in turn led to a large number of apprentices joining, and although the steam engine bases, which needed to be highly precise, still relied on Anna to make them, Roland thought they were taking a step forward nonetheless. After all, the only tool this group of people had ever touched was the blacksmith's hammer, or they were simply just miners or hunters.

But this was almost like saying that the workers were manufacturing the steam engines on their own.

In addition, ordinary people also took care of all the arrangements necessary during the production of bullets and gunpowder. The guns themselves still needed Anna to produce them personally, all of this, just because the town's blast furnace was unable to produce a consistent quality of steel, but this issue was already among the problems Roland would be solving in the next stage of his plans.

The chemical breakthroughs were much more surprising, since he honestly did not expect much from them, any outcome was an

unexpected joy. Sulfuric acid and nitric acid had now begun production, and the chemical explosives were also being made, so as long as the bullet production increases, the implementation of the new generation's repeaters was not that far in the future.

It was not important that the method of production was a little primitive, by taking into account the town's current situation, it was far more important to solve the problem. And until Paper's ability stabilizes, and she can precisely control her own magic, maybe then, the industry can reach a new peak.

In essence, no matter whether it was production, education, or construction, Border Town was now walking the path of a favorable development phase. So long as time was enough, the growing number of educated people would bring about breakthroughs in all areas faster and faster.

He turned a barren land into what it is today in the span of only one year, this gave Roland a sense of accomplishment deep within his heart. As he stared at the town from the window, Roland felt like he could spend the whole day doing this.

At this moment, he heard a clear ringing bell sound coming from the northwest, a warning indicating the attack of the demonic beasts.

After the arrival of the Months of Demons, the alarm rang once every three or four days. But the way the First Army dealt with this situation was already perfect, and Roland no longer needed to go to the walls himself to supervise the battle—although only a year ago, he felt like if he didn't show up and was in sight of the militia's

eyes, they might have dropped their weapon and fled in terror.

“Another demonic beast attack, you want me to go take a look?” Nightingale’s voice resounded near his ear.

“Please,” Roland nodded, “but take care.”

“Don’t worry, they can’t touch me.”

As he heard these words, he felt a warm and gentle touch on his cheek, followed by the voice gradually vanishing in the distance.

Roland helplessly shook his head. In such a snowy day, the witches were probably bored, so she might just be looking for something to do, with the excuse of observing the situation. Especially, the several combat witches brought to the town by Tilly, at times like this, they would be the first ones to go to the wall and watch, and in the case of some hybrid species of demonic beasts reaching the wall and trying to climb it, they could show off their skills. After she heard of this, it also piqued Nightingale’s interest, and as soon as the bell rang, she would also go to the wall, maybe looking to compete with someone and finding out who was the strongest combat witch.

Roland gave out a long sigh, If only she were this interested in her studies.

However, since by fighting shoulder to shoulder, the understanding between ordinary people and witches could be

improved, he decided against stopping them. The current revolving rifle used was effective against ordinary demonic beasts, but when facing the wolf-lion hybrid species, it still lacked in firepower. Therefore, by having a powerful combat witch watching over the scene, a stable line of defense could be created, effectively reducing the likelihood of casualties the army might suffer.

An example of this was that, so far, the First Army have not had a single death in battle.

Nightingale's departure amused Roland, finding out that the combat witches had found their own entertainment. However, the support witches on the other hand, did not have many fun things to do. So maybe, it was time for him to create some recreational activities for them.

After thinking up to this point, he called for Soraya.

“Your Highness, do you have a new job for me?”

Soraya, the painter who had made great contributions to Border Town, seemed to be in high spirits, the freckles on her face along with her refreshing smile gave off a childish vitality that she did nothing to conceal.

Her unexpected question made Roland feel slightly sorry, Why do I suddenly feel a sense of guilt?

“Uhh, have you been busy with your work recently?”

“No, why do you ask?” Soraya moved aside the hair on her forehead with her hand, “Since there have been fewer people working at the factory lately, my coating work can be completed in half a day, although it was somewhat busy when Mr. Kyle, the master alchemist, came with the strange metal boxes...” as she said this, she paused for a moment and with a smile plastered on her face, she continued, “But comparing this to the days in which we had to spend camping in the Cooperation Association, I very much prefer this fulfilling life I lead now, and I’m also very happy that my ability can be of help to you.”

Oh... her smile is quite dazzling.

Roland couldn’t help feeling sinful thoughts about to emerge, cough, cough, “I called you here to draw some new cards.”

“More collectible cards?”

“No, you’re probably already tired of them,” he waved with his hand, “After all, the rules are very simple, and if you know the cards in your opponent’s hand, you can pretty much take advantage of it.”

“Yeah, there’s that...”

“Take a look, the new cards are like this one, fairly simple,” he pulled out a piece of paper and drew a rough sketch on it, “they are

divided into four colors, from one to 13, with the last being a king and a queen, and including two jokers, red and black, gives a total of 54 cards.”

The current ability of Soraya had made huge leaps in progress, after drawing directly on the bottom of the sketch, quickly, rigid cards made out of coating was produced, “What kind of game do you play with these?”

“It has many ways of being played, but let’s start with something simple,” Roland tried touching the cards, and immediately felt a familiar sensation from before coming to this world. At New Year, the usual routine a family had was, sitting with their feet inside a hot barrel, watching the Spring Festival show, playing poker all night, and igniting firecrackers until the first light of dawn peaked out, welcoming the arrival of the spring.

Compared with another traditional game like mahjong, playing poker did not require a special table, all you needed to start playing was a board to place the cards, and its gameplay was very diverse, making it one of the most popular games in the world.

“Go and call for Anna,” Roland smiled and said, “I will teach you how to play ‘Fight the Landlord’.”

Chapter 373 – Market And Clues

Ferlin stood behind his wife, who was carefully appraising and picking up goods from the stall.

Whenever she was shopping, Irene's eyes always had this serious look.

“You know... the price of every piece of meat is calculated according to its weight, they are all basically the same.”

“Obviously they are not the same!” she said emphasizing her words, “You like to eat lean meat, right? But if the piece does not have fat, it won't be savory enough after boiling it. A rib with a thin layer of fat is the best, slicing it and frying it in oil is also appropriate, that's why I need to choose carefully.”

Ferlin couldn't help but to laugh, “Ok, you take your time choosing, I'll go ahead and buy a bag of wheat, since the queue is long, come and find me after you finish buying the meat.”

“Ok,” Irene replied without moving her eyes from the stall.

He just shook his head, and after turning around, he walked towards the food stalls of the market.

Since the moment the snow started to fall, the feudal lord erected a wooden shed to protect the market from the wind, a bulletin was also posted on the board, declaring that even during winter, the

sales in the market would not be suspended.

This meant that, even during the long and harsh Months of Demons, this small town would still provide a stable supply of food.

For the town's citizens, this was undoubtedly an incredible reassurance.

Compared with the less frequented meat stalls, the agency in charge of selling grains had far more people. A long line of people was extending from the front of the counter, and there were also two uniformed patrol men maintaining the order. But in this town, they had a completely different name: Police.

With all sorts of amazing innovations that the lord had brought about, Morning Light no longer felt alarmed by such sights, and just changing the name of the patrol guard was not all that strange. He was also aware that the patrol guard's impression on most citizens was that of troublemakers, borderline criminals, but changing its name really made the people feel different about them.

"Mr. Eltek, good afternoon," said someone from the queue who recognized him, "You also came to buy wheat, huh?"

"You can stand with me."

"I'll give you my place."

“No, no,” Ferlin waved his hand, and went to stand at the end of the line, “Thank you though.”

“You are really popular,” the middle-aged man in front of him laughed, “As expected of the one once known as the first knight of the western region, Morning Light.”

Ferlin stared blankly at the man, “You know who I used to...”

“Hahaha, of course, everyone knows of this in Border Town,” the man touched his chin while grinning and said, “Even my son and daughter are very fond of you, and ever since he inquired about your origins, their oldest son, Nate, has been shouting that he will become a knight.”

“It is all in the past now,” Ferlin shook his head, “and besides, His Highness no longer needs a knight.”

“We do have the First Army now,” the middle-aged man said while thinking about something else, “Before you became an ordinary citizen, I would probably be afraid to speak to you like this.”

Indeed, when he was a knight under the duke, most civilians would not even dare to cross eyes with him, the words they spoke about him were truly filled with envy and admiration, but behind them there was still fear. The only one who dared to stare at his eyes, and speak without regards of social status, was Irene—at that first encounter at the theater, he felt his heart finally found a place

to call home.

Being captured after the crushing defeat and coming to Border Town, Ferlin thought he would only be changing lords, but he never expected to find himself as a teacher, spreading the knowledge and gaining the respect of everyone.

This sort of respect was completely different from the one he received as a knight, the crowd did not avoid him, but would come closer instead—comparing it with being respected from a distance, this feeling made Ferlin feel happy and satisfied.

Perhaps, he was not fit to be a knight.



After waiting for fifteen minutes, it finally came the turn of Ferlin Eltek.

“Identification card.” said the clerk, but after turning towards him, she was surprised, “Mr. Ferlin?”

“Betty,” he was surprised too, the girl behind the counter was part of his first group of graduated students. After he somewhat understood the situation, he said with a happy expression, “Did you join the city hall?”

“Yes,” she replied with a cheerful look on her face, and nodded just like she did back in the school, “I am now working as an

apprentice for this office, under the Ministry of Agriculture.”

Ferlin didn't want to make the people still in the line wait, so he handed over his ID card and six silver royals, “I'll take a medium bag of wheat.”

“Yes!” she registered the name in the book, then she went to the back and called out for a porter to bring a bag of wheat and place it in the counter. In here, he cannot inspect the goods, and choosing from among the bags was also not accepted. All the bags are packed the same way, and according to their weight, they are divided into three categories, large, medium, and small. The medium bag he bought was almost enough for two people to eat for a month.

The grain prices were fixed, hardly showing any fluctuation, also you must show your identity card at the moment of your purchase, and the amount allowed to be purchased is limited. But Ferlin understood the reason, this measure was obviously taken in order to avoid people from buying food in large quantities, causing the people who were genuinely in need of food, to have nothing to buy.

“Teacher, when you have time, pay me a visit at my home.” Betty handed over the ID card back to him.

“Sure,” Ferlin answered with a smile and took the wheat bag, then while he walked away, he searched for a place to rest. Up until now, Irene still hadn't joined him yet, so it was likely that she was still looking for other goods. So he simply tried to find an obvious and dry position, and after putting the bag on the ground, he sat down to rest for a moment.

Just at that moment, a blue figure passed in front of his eyes.

Morning Light was startled, and as he looked over his shoulder, his whole body trembled—a beautiful woman with fine facial features, and that unusual deep blue hair, a type he would never forget. Ferlin felt his whole body stiffened and his blood froze, but not because of the outstanding appearance of the woman, but... he had seen this honorable person in his household's main hall.

As a child, he had always asked about the identity of the person whose portrait was hanging on the wall of the hall, but his father never spoke about it. She was undoubtedly a woman, and her portrait was apparently more important than all the other portraits of all his grandfathers, it was only after his father was dead-drunk, that he heard him mention something about her.

If he remembered correctly, the person in the painting was the founder of the Eltek household.

How... How can this be possible?

“Sorry, did you wait long?” Irene’s voice pulled him back from his chaotic thoughts, “I went to pick up some eggs afterwards, oh, and I also bought a small bag of butter. Did you get the wheat?”

“Yeah...” Ferlin said absentmindedly.

After returning home, that image was still fresh in his eyes, the

figure of that blue haired woman... Why would she be in Border Town? What is an ancestor of the Eltek family doing here?

After hesitating for a long time, he decided to return to Longsong Stronghold.

When he told Irene his plan to return to the stronghold city, she just raised a brow and asked, "Didn't you already cut ties with your family? Why are you returning over there?"

"Uhh... because..." he showed hesitation in his voice, "because of something."

"Inheritance?" Irene tilted her head while guessing, "No, it's something else, is it because of... a woman?"

Cough, cough, Ferlin almost choked, "I'll never do something like that!"

"But your eyes tell me you're lying," she motioned Morning Light to sit on a chair, and with an imposing gaze she spoke, "You promised me that you would always be my knight, and I also believe that you'd never break that promise, but that's also the reason I feel particularly curious... Why can't you tell me? Do you remember our old farm house on the outskirts of Longsong Stronghold? In front of it, we agreed that we would never keep any secret from each other."

She had such an honest look on her face that expressed, not

matter what, she would always want to share everything with him, whether it was good or bad—and even after going through all the problems that arose from the Duke’s defeat, Irene had not changed at all.

Ferlin took a deep breath, and after pulling her into her arms, in a whispering voice he told her his worries.

“So, it was that,” after hearing this, Irene nodded, “Then you really need to go.”

“You... do you believe me?” Even to him, this strange story about an ancestor that was apparently living in the town sounded like nothing more than a delusion.

“Of course I believe you,” she responded with a wink, “This time, you didn’t look away.”

Chapter 374 – Back To The Hometown

It was reasonable to think that once he had cut ties with his family, the same applied to him returning to the Eltek territory. But Ferlin was not trying to find an answer for his own sake... but for the sake of his father.

That day, after the banquet, Sir Eltek not only talked about the person in the painting, but was also filled with emotions, saying that it was because of her kindness that the family was there, but also that this kindness was betrayed by his grandfather. Ferlin couldn't understand these words at the time, but his father's attitude remained fresh in his mind—deep shame for the actions his grandfather had taken.

But if it was shame, maybe there was still a chance for salvation. Perhaps, that woman he saw in the market was a descendent of the family's benefactor.

He had left the family because of Irene, because he didn't want to be separated from her, but since he was the eldest son, his family couldn't accept him formally marrying a commoner. This was simply a difference in ideology, it was not like the Eltek family couldn't afford to lose him.

After marrying Irene, he had not seen his father, Sir Eltek, even once, but every now and then, his mother would send a trusted servant to deliver some daily necessities along with a letter, always telling him that his father had already forgiven him.

It was for these reasons that Ferlin chose to bring the news of what he saw back to his father.

Due to the impact caused by the Months of Demons, the number of boats traveling between Border Town and the stronghold city had been drastically reduced. He had to wait three days for a ship to arrive from the stronghold, and then, adding the time it took for it to finish unloading its cargo, a week passed before he finally set foot in Longsong Stronghold.

As he got off the boat and walked onto the wharf, Ferlin immediately felt as if the city was abandoned. The snow on the ground was ankle high, and aside from a few alleys where traces of footprints still remained, the snow piling up in the streets made it clear that nobody had passed through those paths in a long time. Comparing this with Border Town, where people busily came and went even during the months of demons, it was hard to believe that this was the largest city of the western region.

The Eltek territory was located north of the stronghold, a village with 2000 acres of land. And even if the stronghold gave off this desolate vibe, the sight in the village was even more unbearable.

As he rode a carriage towards the Eltek's mansion, all he could see along the way was a world of demise—this year's snow that came ahead of time during autumn, had caught the majority of the poverty-stricken people unprepared, and with neither grain nor firewood stored in enough quantities, it was likely that at least half of them would not endure until the next spring. This was a common sight during the Months of Demons, but even then, it was something Ferlin just couldn't get used to.

After leaving a few scattered, roughly-built houses behind, Ferlin finally returned to that same gateway after so many years.

The garden's main gates were closed, and the front courtyard was covered with snow, but a few of the stone walkways were cleared out, showing that there were still people in the family who took care of the mansion.

He knocked on the iron gate loudly, and soon after, two guards came out of the mansion, one of which immediately recognized Ferlin's identity, and exclaimed with surprise, "You, you are... the eldest son of the Master."

"I want to see Sir Eltek," Ferlin said with a composed face.

Although everyone in the mansion knew that Morning Light had severed ties with the family, as a matter concerning the nobility, the guards dared not to make any assumption. The two men soon opened the iron gates, one led him to the reception room, while the other one went to inform the steward of the house.

Ferlin didn't actually expect that the first family member he would meet after coming here would be his brother, Miso Eltek.

"You do not belong here, why did you come back?" Miso frowned as he looked at his older brother, "How did you come over? And where is your squire?"

“I’m not a knight anymore,” Ferlin answered with a smile, “therefore, I no longer need a squire.”

“Ah, I almost forgot, you were crushed by the Prince of Border Town, becoming his prisoner, but why did he release you?” Miso snorted, “Oh, did you come because you need money for the winter? I can spare some change, but then you will need to immediately leave.”

The attitude his brother was taking made Ferlin let out a deep sigh, but it was not that difficult to understand—Miso Eltek had now become the first heir of the family, so it was natural not wanting to have his older brother come back in order to avoid complications.

“I am not here to receive money, and neither do I have the intention of fighting for the succession of the house,” Morning Light’s voice sounded deep, “The prince has hired me as a teacher, and I’m honestly happy with my current life.”

“Teacher?” Miso repeated, a little surprised, “How come that I don’t remember you having such a high education, enough to teach other nobles?”

“I’m not teaching the nobility, I teach those of the general population about how to read and write.”

“You mean you teach commoners?” Miso said with a grin, “The lies you make up are becoming more and more interesting, has getting married to that commoner woman you were obsessed

about finally affected your sanity?”

“Enough!” a loud and imposing shout came from behind, causing Miso to tremble in place. Ferlin turned his head towards the source of the voice, and found it belonged to his father, Sir Eltek. “Ms. Irene is not inferior in any way to the nobles, the only thing she lacks is a title, it would be rude for her if you continue.”

“Father!” Miso shouted.

The lord paid no heed to his younger son and spoke, “I heard from the guard, do you have something to tell me?”

“Yes,” Ferlin said as he bowed in courtesy.

“Then, let’s go to my study.”



Ferlin followed after his father and they both walked towards the study located on the second floor of the mansion. As they walked by the hallway, he took the opportunity to observe the portrait hanging from the wall, and the very same blue-haired woman appeared in from of him again—she had almost the exact appearance of the person he found at the town’s market. And unlike the other portraits, the colors in this painting were very bright, and the details were much more refined, even the mole near the corner of her eye could be clearly recognized.

After they went into the study, his father was the first one to break the silence, “I saw your wife during the theater performances in autumn. Her semblance was very good, and her acting did not pale in comparison to Miss May’s. Looks like you’ll have a bright future together.”

Ferlin suddenly felt moved, he never expected his father to be the one mentioning this, and after a moment of silence, he finally nodded, “Yes, we already have our own house in Border Town, and we intend to have a baby after this year’s Months of Demons.”

“That’s good to hear,” his father slowly took a sip from his tea, “It shouldn’t have been easy to come back here from Border Town at this time of the year, what is this news you need to tell me?”

The mood of Morning Light immediately changed, “I met this woman in Border Town, she looks exactly like the person in the main hall’s portrait.”

As he heard these words, Sir Eltek trembled, almost spilling the contents of the cup, then he stared at his son and said, “What did you just say?”

“Rare blue hair, extremely beautiful, I’m sure I’m not mistaken,” Ferlin said, “maybe she’s a descendant of the person in the painting.”

“Impossible! That person was—” he cut his words, and after shaking his head he continued, “She can’t have children.”

“So... it was like that?” Ferlin lowered his gaze, “Then, perhaps I was mistaken.”

“You came all the way to Longsong Stronghold only to tell me this?”

“Yeah, because I remember that once... you expressed great regret towards her.”

Sir Eltek looked downwards for a moment, “Did she really look identical to the portrait?”

“Apart from a slightly different hair length...” Ferlin tried to recall her image, “Everything else was exactly the same. You know, ever since the moment of my birth up until now, I’ve only seen that hair color in the portrait, so I obviously paid extra attention.”

“She can’t be a descendant of that person,” his father hesitated to continue, “but she might be the person in the portrait herself.”

His father’s argument made Ferlin question the words his ears heard, an idea so inconceivable that was far beyond his own imagination, “The person herself? You mean... she’s been alive for over 400 years?”

“I didn’t want to tell you this,” he rose from his seat and said, “She’s a witch. And since she is a witch, anything is possible. Come, walk with me.”

“Where to?”

“The basement, I have something to show you,” said his father, as if speaking work by word, “Something from our ancestors’ heritage, a thing she left behind, a ‘Relic’.”

Chapter 375 – Last Wish

The basement of the Eltek mansion was a familiar place for Ferlin.

When he was a kid, he used this place as his own adventuring spot, exploring and searching through all the dusty boxes and finding all sorts of different and strange things, it was a very fun game for him. Obviously, his father eventually found out and after beating him up, he banned him from entering the basement alone again, but Ferlin would always find a way to sneak in.

After arriving at the basement, his father took him into the innermost stone chamber. Among the walls, smalls blue crystals the size of a fist were embedded, giving off a faint light—Ferlin couldn't help but to gasp, every one of those rocks was a God Punishment Stone of the highest quality. When he came in as a child, he didn't know about them, but now, he naturally knew their meaning. The high quality sacred stones were very valuable, and ones of this size could fetch at least a price of between five to six hundred gold royals each.

Was the Eltek family always this rich?

Then he suddenly remembered, the treasure map he had given to His Highness also came out from this room.

The stone room had chests all along the walls, giving a similar image to the one in his memory from the last time he was here. Sir Eltek pulled out a bunch of keys from his pocket, and as he opened

up one of the largest chests, along with a creaking sound, the cover raised a cloud of dust.

Ferlin held his breath as he looked into the chest—it was divided into several compartments, making it look like an enlarged version of a jewelry box used by a noble lady, and each section was replete with gems of different colors.

Is this our ancestor's heritage? The relic she left behind?

“It's been a long time since the last time I came down here,” his father said as he let out a sigh, “Every time I see these magic stones, I remember the burdening confessions that my ancestor said.”

“Magic stones?” Surprised by these words, Ferlin asked.

“Yes, a very valuable item that only can be used by a witch,” he replied while nodding, “It's a long story, but basically our family, was established under the blessing of a witch.”

His father then proceeded to tell Ferlin the story about the origins of the family, which turned out to be different from what he always heard during childhood. The founders of the Eltek family were not from the west, they had come from beyond the Impassable Mountain Range, from a barbaric open land that nobody now even dared to set foot on.

Ferlin's eyes started to widen with surprise, he could never have

thought that there was such an extraordinary hidden secret behind that portrait.

His father spoke to him about the effective founder, Lady Agatha, who along with many other witches, had establish a large kingdom. In this kingdom, they were the ruling class, in a similar way as what nobility was currently regarded as. But it eventually met its demise, at the hands of the Devils from Hell and the war they brought.

When the final battle came, the remaining survivors scattered and fled. At that time, Lady Agatha took a group of people and went into the Concealing Forest, to her stone tower in order to secure the materials from her experiments, while the rest of the group joined the fleeing survivors and went towards what's known today as Greycastle—at that time, all the kingdoms were nothing more than a barren piece of land.

“Our ancestors were among the other group that fled?” Ferlin asked with a hoarse voice.

“Yes, he was her chamberlain, and was supposed to go together with her into the forest, but at the last minute he got cold feet and backed down, offering to stay and look after the supplies instead, to which Lady Agatha agreed.” His father continued in a deep voice, “You should be aware of what this means.”

Ferlin answered with just a nod. A chamberlain could be regarded as part of the family but without blood ties, and was the most trusted retainer for a master. And more often than not, they chose to die along with their masters, unless that master

specifically ordered them otherwise.

Taking the initiative to distance himself from his master when he sensed danger was tantamount to betrayal, even if his master refused to let him stay.

“When our ancestors arrived to this western region, they fell into despair, feeling a deep sense of regret and remorse, and began to record all of those emotions in this book,” Sir Eltek reached out and grabbed a black-cover book from another chest, “After watching his master failing to return, he broke off any connection to the Federation, and after gathering the rest of the servants, they all left the refugee camp finally settling down in this piece of uncultivated land.”

Ferlin took the book presented by his father, but he didn’t open it, his mind was instead filled with a more terrible revelation. “So, this means that you knew that everything the church did and preached was wrong from the very beginning?”

If the witches had once made a commitment to fight against the Devils, why is it that now they are being branded as the Devil’s pawns? It was clear that there was something below the surface regarding all these matters.

“Yes, I knew, but there was nothing I could do,” his father answered him calmly, “If I were to find a witch in our territory, I would definitely help her hide. But I couldn’t save those from the stronghold, after all, Duke Ryan didn’t hold them in high esteem—he hated the witches even more than the Church did. From the records left behind by all of our Household’s successors, every one

of them did the same thing helping the witches... only they did not tell those lucky witches they had saved about the witches' kingdom."

"Where are they now? Are they still among the family?"

"How could they be? It is obvious that they already passed away," he spread out his hands, "Although it was very rare to reach that age, they lived up to sixty or seventy years, but they were humans after all, so they eventually grew old and died."

"But yet, you believe our first ancestor is still alive?"

"That's only a possibility—after all, the witches have a variety of abilities but they cannot reproduce, so I was just speculating."

Ferlin pondered for a moment before changing the topic, "Did our ancestors never try to go into the Concealing Forest in order to find Lady Agatha?"

"It's not that easy," his father shook his head, "If even a witch could not safely return, ordinary people, no matter how many, will make no difference. Besides, the western region was nothing more than a wasteland 400 years ago, there were wild animals and dense forests everywhere. It was already hard enough to settle down on this land, so there was no time to worry about something else. But every one of our ancestors wrote this in their wills, they had hope that future generations could go into the Concealing Forest, and reach the stone tower, even if only to take a glance at it."

After listening to his father, Morning Light took a deep breath and opened the heavy, dusty old book. As he began to read, he could feel from the very first page, the remorse hidden behind the words.

Many of those written words had become blurred by the passage of time, but it was for that same reason that the heavy emotions were more evident. He didn't know how long he spent reading the book, but as he turned to the last page, he noticed that maybe all the contents written inside were not a testament, but unfulfilled yearnings, a 'one last wish'.

This was probably the reason why his father showed regret that time when he was drunk.

He himself, as a former knight, could empathize with it.

"Do you want me to find her?" Ferlin broke the silence with this question, "If she really is Agatha, she probably lives in the prince's castle, as far as I know, many witches are gathered there."

"Witches are gathered in the castle?" Sir Eltek mused over those words, "No wonder why Longsong Stronghold issued a notice about the recruitment of witches a few days ago. It would seem like His Highness has finally made up his mind to have the Church as an enemy," he then shook his head, "No, you don't have to go look for her."

Ferlin was slightly surprised by this unexpected answer, "Don't you want to see her?"

“How often does an ancestor come to see their descendants?” Sir Eltek smiled, “Of course we will go see her.”

“W... we?”

“Yeah, I’ll go together with you to Border Town,” his father smiled at him and as he stroked his chin he continued, “Also, take all these things with you, if she really is Agatha herself, the wishes of our ancestors will finally be fulfilled.”

Chapter 376 – Castle's New Facilities

“What are those?” Andrea asked as she chew on some dried fish.

His Highness, the Prince of Greycastle, was making something new again. He joined together sections of copper pipes, and had Anna weld the joints, then Soraya used her magic coating to wrap an insulating layer around them. At first glance, it looked like it was just the usual bathroom plumbing, only a lot bigger in size. Each one of them had a width close to an adult's thigh, and if not for Hummingbird's weight-reducing ability, one might not be able to move them.

And there were more than one or two rooms with these copper tubes installed, they extended across the whole castle and the witch building. They came from a corner of the room, all the way through the bottom of the wall, into a strange metal shutter and towards the next room, where they connected to a continuing pipe at the end.

This huge project attracted many witches who came to observe. Whether they were from Sleeping Island or belonged to the Witch Union, they all showed great curiosity about it.

“Can any of you guess?” the prince smiled mysteriously, “If you can guess correctly, I'll let you have an extra serving of ice cream sandwich for dinner.”

Andrea suddenly became very interested, ice cream sandwich! This was the most amazing food in this place, two pieces of toasted

bread filled in with sweet ice cream in between, it was like nothing she had ever seen in the Kingdom of Dawn. The first time she ate it, she instantly fell in love with this marvelous food. And despite Ashes repeatedly teasing her about it, she still ate it with a blissful expression on her face, since leaving the sandwich alone in the plate was a torture to her.

“Is this going to supply the rooms with water?” Ashes frowned.

What a narrow-minded remark, Andrea thought, copper is not a cheap metal, and since even the small pipes used in the bathroom can deliver enough water, why would the pipes need to be so big?

But recently, she was mocked by Ashes with a ‘Who said that the most delicious food is the one with the original flavor?’ as a counterargument. And since she indeed said those words in front of Lady Tilly, it was really inconvenient, so she had to pretend that she didn’t hear such superficial words.

“What a narrow-minded remark, why would there be the need for such a large water pipe?” someone said behind Andrea, “His Highness wouldn’t do such a pointless thing.”

Perfect! Exactly what I was thinking, those words lifted Andrea’s spirit. Other than herself and Miss Nightingale of the Witch Union, nobody else dared to use this kind of tone with an Exceed witch.

She turned around and saw the other witch looking down at Ashes with ridicule, the smug look on her face and the chin raised

slightly was simply perfect. But nobility should not use such expression!

Still, Andrea secretly cheered on this woman, who was the most approachable witch for her since she first arrived at Border Town. During the rescue operation in the ruined tower, Nightingale had already demonstrated extraordinary skills. She also shared noble origins, and even her hair color was very close to Andrea's!

After several battles sniping demonic beasts and hybrid species from the top of the wall, Nightingale also recognized Andrea's ability and shared some dried fish with her, quite in a noble's way.

But most importantly, she also didn't like Ashes.

Although I'm not sure how Ashes managed to offend her the first time she came to Border Town, but... the enemy of my enemy is my friend, right? And her personality is also compatible with mine.

"It seems like you already know the answer," Ashes shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course, I know it," Nightingale said as the corners of her mouth rose, "I was in His Highness' office when he was drawing the schematics, so I saw all the designs he made with my own eyes."

"That's not fair!" Mystery Moon muttered.

“She won’t take part in this small quiz,” the prince’s words turned Nightingale’s triumphant expression into a stiff one, “I’ll give you a hint, these pipes are just part of a bigger system, if you look at the rest of it, it might be easier to guess the correct answer.”

“Guu!” Maisie and Lightning immediately flew out of the room. The other witches, unwilling to be left behind, also hurried outside in order to find out the place where the pipes went.

Andrea deliberately fell behind, and after everyone finally left, she winked at Nightingale and called her to outside the door. “Just what in the word is this?” she whispered, “If it’s the correct answer, I’ll share half of the ice cream sandwich with you at dinner.”

“I don’t know either,” Nightingale’s answer shocked her.

“Didn’t you say that you saw all the designs?”

“Yes, but it’s the same as with《Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science》, even if you know the words, can you really understand the real meaning behind them?”

“Uh—” Andrea opened her mouth to reply, but found that Nightingale’s excuse was perfectly reasonable. She skimmed over the pages by herself once, but those words made the same sense to her as the holy bible.

“Among the Witch Union, I’m afraid Anna is the only one who has the ability to understand His Highness’ intentions just by looking at the drawings,” Nightingale said as if giving her a hint, “If you go ahead and ask her, I’m sure she’ll be able to tell you the answer.”

After Nightingale left, Andrea hesitated for a while before finally deciding not to call Anna outside the room. She was not being shy or embarrassed, she just... decided it out of respect. Neither the wicked criminals, nor the ruthless Army of Judges scared her, but she felt true fear towards this young girl who wasn’t even twenty-year-old.

She recalled that one time she passed by the prince’s office, and overheard Anna talking to His Highness... Even now, recalling the content of their conversation gave her goosebumps. High-angle parabolic calculation, parameter correction of the landing point, kinetic energy conversion in an ideal state... all those weird terms shocked her still.

Why is it that even though she’s a witch like me, Anna can fluently speak words I can barely understand?

Since that moment, Andrea had a totally different image of Anna, not like she was a person like herself, but like she was in a totally different league at the same level as Tilly.

Since she couldn’t ask for an answer, she decided to rely on herself. According to the hints the prince gave, Andrea left the

room to explore—at the end of the hallway, she found a finished room with the same copper pipes separated by a horizontal iron fence, seemingly placed to prevent people from coming in contact with the pipes. If it wasn't for some barbarian like Ashes, she thought, people wouldn't really touch these. Thinking about the words Nightingale said, 'His Highness wouldn't do such a pointless thing', it seemed like these iron fences obviously served a different purpose.

When she came to the first floor of the witches' house, she discovered something new, there was a newly-built shed between the castle and the witches' house, and the copper pipes leading to those two buildings extended from here. Inside the shed there was a huge iron box, the lower half of this box was hollow, and in the top of it a huge chimney sprung upwards... almost like a cooking stove. She saw a pipe directly connecting to the well in the castle's yard, similar to the water supply for the water tower.

Wait a minute... is this supposed to be used to boil water? But the small pipes can be used to transport the hot water, there is no need for them to be this big. Andrea was baffled, and even after thinking about this for a long time, she couldn't figure out its purpose.

Before dinner started, the prince gathered all the witches in the main hall and as he smiled, said, "Today, the castle's heating system is officially started."

"Heating system?" Ashes asked puzzled.

"Yes, at the boiler room, the hot water reaches a high enough temperature to turn it into steam, which then goes down the pipes

and into the rooms, raising their temperature through the radiators. All you need to do is shut the doors and windows, and soon the whole room will be warmed up.” The prince explained, “It’s not always easy to keep moving the heating buckets, and we need to keep the windows open, otherwise we run the risk of getting carbon monoxide poisoning. But with this new heating equipment, that issue is no longer of concern, you can also enjoy a spring-like warmth while you’re sleeping. When the test trials are over, the residential areas will also gradually enjoy this new heating equipment.

“And now, tonight’s ice cream sandwich winner. Aside from Anna, Soraya and Hummingbird, whom were involved in the installation of the heating system, the one who guessed correctly was... Tilly!”

At dinner, Andrea, completely forgetting about her dignity as a noble, helplessly stared at Lady Tilly as she deliciously ate the ice cream sandwich with a huge smile on her face.

Chapter 377 – Below Zero

The boiler heating system was not really that complicated, essentially it only boiled the water turning it into steam that then was piped into the rooms, and had its heat spread from the radiator. To transport the heat, he could either use water or steam, but Roland decided for the latter, since steam could reach a higher temperature, and it was more convenient to the circulation system.

Obviously, steam heating also had its flaws. The pipes were in a constant high-pressure state, and if the joints were not firm and secure, it was easy to have leaks or even cause a steam explosion. If a high-pressure steam jet with a temperature of between two hundred to three hundred degrees was to get in touch with the skin it would rip it open, therefore, the required quality standards needed to be higher for this installation. Anna's black fire welding could guarantee the strength of the joints, and adding Soraya's coating on top of that, this risk could be minimized without doubt.

When Roland set up this new heating system, he also added an automatic pressure-relief valve on the boiler. The mechanical principle was the same as the centrifugal governor of the steam engines, when the pressure inside the boiler chamber was too high, the flywheel would rotate at a high speed, causing the valve to lift, releasing the steam and therefore, lowering the pressure.

The last safety measure was located between the boiler and the two heating pipes. He had Anna form several grooves around the connecting brass tube in order to decrease the stress applied by the high pressure, in a similar way to what food cans had in his past life. So even if the pressure valve failed to open like it should, the

explosion would be contained within the boiler, without endangering the lives of the people inside the room.

When the heating system was finally up and running, the image inside the castle changed completely.

The heavy and thick winter wardrobe of the witches was gone, and was replaced by their unlined autumn clothes. As he looked at the girls in front of him, laughing and chatting in those colorful clothes, Roland felt his motivation to work virtually increase by at least five percent.

Of course, these facilities were only used to enjoy the warmth during winter, or as an auxiliary device to help create a better working environment.

But what needed to be done next, was a much more important project directly related to the future of the western region. It was to accomplish the production of synthetic ammonia, reducing the reliance on saltpeter, and therefore, achieving what was referred as 'a new height' in the production of chemical explosives, so that he could meet the requirements needed for the expansion of the automatic firing weapons.

If he could achieve this goal before the end of the winter, it would definitely prove to be a heavy asset for his planned spring offensive.

Roland called for Kyle Sichi and Agatha, and had them come into his office.

“How are you faring together so far?” The prince asked with a smile.

One was the Chief Alchemist of Border Town, who had a feeling beyond love for the alchemy and hardly ever cared about the thoughts or opinions of others. The other one, a witch from a long forgotten kingdom, proud of being a member of the highest research institute, the Exploration Society. Both of them had very straight-forward tempers, and having them together was like a gunpowder keg ready to blow up.

Roland often worried about whether they might quarrel, but he needed them both to work together in order to produce the nitric explosives and the synthetic ammonia. So, he asked about the situation first, hoping for the best, otherwise the most he could do was only mediate between them.

“Very good,” Kyle’s first unexpected words surprised Roland, “Miss Agatha’s ability is proving to be of great help during the chemical experiments, and it has helped me find the stable temperature for the synthesis of nitroglycerin. The laboratory’s schedule is also moving as planned, after further testing, the industrial production can begin... It can be said that without the frozen beakers, none of this could be achieved. Oh, we’ve been very busy with our experiments, that’s the reason you were not notified.” He paused for a moment, “Incidentally, since you already asked about this, can I return to the laboratory now? I still have a lot of work left to do.”

Uh... is that so? Roland’s gaze moved over to Agatha, who simply

noded.

“Mr. Kyle’s knowledge is quite different from the regular people, especially about the perception of the basic elements, which is similar to that of the Exploration Society. Our cooperation so far has been very pleasant, and I’m sure if he were to be in Taqila, he would without doubts be recruited by the Federation.”

Was it actually easier to get along with someone with a straightforward temper? It seems like I worried for nothing... And why does the Chief Alchemist have a better attitude towards a witch than towards his lord? This is really sad... Roland cried in his heart, and after clearing his throat he said, “That being the case, I feel relieved. The reason I called for you is because I have a new research needing to be done.”

After hearing the word research, Kyle immediately showed interest, “By all means.”

“Like I once said, there are many different kinds of gases in the air, and now it’s the time for us to use them.” Roland expressed his idea roughly, “According to what’s recorded in 《Elementary Chemistry》, oxygen and nitrogen account for nearly 99% of the air. What I need you to do is to separate those two gases, in order to use them in chemical production.

Kyle pondered for a moment, “In other words, separate them by taking advantage of their individual characteristics... for example, using the difference in boiling and melting point in order to separate them?”

“Yes,” Roland gave his approval with a nod, “By condensing and lowering the temperature, since the boiling point of the nitrogen is lower than the oxygen, oxygen will be the first one to separate into a liquid. But since the needed temperature is far below zero, it was difficult to achieve with our current means, therefore, you will need Agatha’s ability to achieve this.”

“Turning the air into a liquid,” Kyle said as he stroke his beard while grinning, “It sounds very interesting.”

“And if the temperature is lowered even further, it can even become a solid, similar to ice,” Roland said with a smile. This was definitely a scene the alchemist might never imagined, holding that seemingly ethereal gas in his own hands—although to achieve this, he would need to take proper anti-freezing measures.

Agatha seemed puzzled as she asked, “I also read some of that in the book, but when I tried to freeze the air, it didn’t solidify into a variety of gases like you just said.”

“That’s because they’re all mixed together and not by layers, so it’s hard to tell just by looking with the naked eye,” Roland explained. “The first step is to separate the carbon dioxide since its boiling point is relatively high, but due to the low amounts present in the air, you won’t even notice the tiny particles it forms after it solidifies. The next ones are oxygen and nitrogen, perfect and harmonious together with a light blue color. But if you don’t separate them, they will mix and appear as a pure substance. Actually, liquid nitrogen should be colorless.”

“How should we do it?”

“Prepare a distillation tower first,” the prince grinned and said, “It is an important project.”

Without a doubt, the abilities of Agatha alone wouldn't be enough. Glass is easily broken under repeated temperature changes, therefore, the container for the liquid air experiment needed to be made out of steel.

This was not difficult for Anna to make, but in order to observe the changes in the air inside the fully enclosed device, the magic eye of Sylvie was needed. Then, after having Agatha record the specific amount of magic consumed in order to have the liquid nitrogen boiling, and stable production temperature parameter could be obtained.

All the preparations took three days.

When the container was finished, Roland headed towards the chemistry laboratory to oversee the first test of oxygen-nitrogen separation conducted in Border Town.

Chapter 378: Oxygen And Nitrogen

Agatha, Sylvie, Chavez and Kyle Sichi would conduct the experiment. Carter, Iron Axe, Barov and all the other witches of the Witch Union were also required by Roland to come to the lab, as it was an experiment of great practical and educational significance. The fifth laboratory was chosen for this event, given that it was the largest lab and had enough space for the two dozen people.

Considering the experiment was the first of its kind, Roland had built a tower-shaped vessel which was only as tall as a man with a diameter of one meter instead of a giant fractionation vessel. The inside of the vessel was divided into three parts. The air would enter the vessel through the bottom part and come out through the two parts above.

Before separating the air, Roland gave them a simple lecture on chemistry, telling them what was going to happen and putting forward a few questions for them to think about and try to answer. It was a trick frequently used by chemistry teachers to intrigue their students and enhance the effects of the lesson.

"... theoretically, when Agatha cools down the vessel and brings down its internal temperature, the air inside will gradually be condensed into liquid, and drip down into the bottom of the vessel through the holes in the plate. So when you see liquid at the bottom, please let us know."

Roland explained to Sylvie in detail, because no one except her could directly see into the vessel and describe the changes

happening inside.

Sylvie nodded somewhat skeptically, "Will I really see liquid appear? Will it not be only the water vapor inside the vessel?"

"No, it's different. The liquefied air is light blue, completely different from water vapor." Roland shook his head and explained further, "Plus, at that temperature, the water vapor will be solidified into ice crystals long before the air." Then he made a gesture toward Agatha and said, "Let's get started."

"Wait... Do we not have to plug up the hole in the vessel's bottom now?" she asked.

"Block it up later. Otherwise, the vessel won't have enough air inside to bring about significant changes." As this was only an experiment, he chose the easiest way for air intake—when the air temperature inside the vessel was rapidly lowered, the internal pressure would fall, and thereby draw the air into the vessel. In mass production, cooling down the air cost too much energy and the cool air would run off continuously. Therefore, this cooling method was considered inefficient and rarely applied in practice. However, Agatha's magic power could bring down the vessel's temperature more efficiently than any refrigerators, saving Roland the trouble to prepare an air pump.

Agatha took a deep breath and pressed her hands onto the fractionation vessel.

About half a minute later, whistling sounds could be clearly

heard as the air was rapidly passing through the air intake pipe. White frost could be seen by the naked eye around the pipe hole, and its area gradually expanded—the water in the air nearby was quickly solidified, and then adhered to the vessel. Anna turned her Blackfire into threads to clean up these continuously thickening ice crystals.

"I see some liquid appearing on the plate, but there's more white frost inside." Sylvie said in an amazement a moment later.

"The white frost may be the solidified water vapor or the crystallized carbon dioxide," explained Roland. "Considering that there's only a small portion of carbon dioxide in the air, most of it should be solidified water vapor."

In normal production, air must be dried out first before being sucked into the fractionating vessel. Otherwise, the solidified water vapor would block the parting plates and the holes, and thus decrease the production efficiency.

Several minutes later, Sylvie reported to Roland that the bottom part of the vessel had been filled with light blue liquid. Roland immediately instructed Soraya to block the holes in the air intake pipe and seal them with coatings.

The next thing to do was heat the vessel, a crucial step in this experiment.

When the liquefied air was heated, the nitrogen would first reach its boiling point, vaporize and run off due to the different boiling

points of nitrogen and oxygen. In this way the two could be separated. Due to the fact that Roland forgot the exact temperature at which nitrogen reached its boiling point, and that he had no way to measure it either, it all depended on Agatha to control the temperature. If she managed to heat the fractionation vessel to the right temperature, the nitrogen gas would come out via the exhaust pipe and the liquid in the bottom part would grow bluer and bluer, with an increasing purity of oxygen.

Fortunately, Agatha was familiar with magic power control. She accurately adjusted the cooling range, increasing the temperature slowly. After a while, Sylvie observed that the liquid was boiling. She saw bubbles around the coating pipe which was plunged into the water. At the same time, Keymor quickly collected several bottles of gas, using the drainage gas-gathering method.

"This is nitrogen?" Lily twitched her lips and said, "I can't see anything at all."

"That's exactly the first question I put forward earlier," Roland said, "How do we prove it's different from the air?"

"Test it with a piece of burning wood," Tilly answered first, "it'll extinguish the fire instantly if it's nitrogen. According to Elementary Chemistry, everything requires oxygen to burn."

"Cool it down again and condense it back into liquid," Agatha said after thinking for a while, "Didn't you say that liquefied nitrogen is colorless?"

"How about pouring out the remaining liquid in the vessel and proving it's pure oxygen? By doing so we can verify the diversity of air composition." Anna suggested.

In the lab, only a few quick learners eagerly proposed different methods and began a heated discussion, while the others remained silent. Roland looked around and found Nightingale, Andrea, Maggie, the City Hall Director and the Chief Knight Carter all seeming confused and at a loss. Iron Axe, the commander of the First Army, on the other hand, always maintained the same facial expression. Roland believed that Iron Axe would probably give him a nod no matter what he said.

Roland sighed silently. "It looks like this chemistry lecture is a little above their level."

Perhaps the only ones who could really share His Highness's happiness at this moment would be Kyle Sichi and Chavez.

"Your Highness, it's really... amazing," the young alchemist exclaimed, "and you've proven what's written in the Elementary Chemistry is true. I'm afraid it has never occurred to alchemists that even the air around us is so complicated."

"With pure oxygen, it's possible to observe more intense oxidation reactions, right? I have a lot more experiments to try out now." Kyle said in excitement.

Roland nodded and an idea suddenly jumped into his head.

Nitrogen was the most important raw material for synthetic ammonia. It can react with hydrogen at a high temperature and under high pressure to form ammonia that can be used to manufacture nitrogenous fertilizer and synthesize nitrogen oxides, which can be further used to produce nitric acid. However, in order to carry out this plan, much work needed to be done and many pieces of equipment needed to be built, such as air pumps and vacuum gas holders. Even if Paper has the magic power to work as a catalyst, it would require repeated testing.

Now, with pure oxygen and pure nitrogen, why not try to produce nitrogen monoxide?

The reaction of oxygen and nitrogen in nature wasn't an automatic one because it was an exothermic reaction that required external energy, such as an electric discharge in which an electric arc can instantly heat the air up to a temperature of thousands of degrees. That's why places where thunder and lightning frequently occurred had more fertile lands, and why ammonia was often used instead to produce nitric acid in the chemical industry. The electrical method of production was not a common practice as it costed too much energy and required extremely high-quality equipment.

Yet it was the most efficient method in case of an emergency, as it didn't even require any catalyst, simply constant electric discharge... in fact, any other means that produce the extremely high temperatures that electric arcs can achieve will do.

Roland naturally thought of Blackfire.

He was sure that it was easy for Anna to manipulate her Blackfire, which worked as an efficient and powerful electric discharge. Now all they needed to do to produce nitrogen monoxide was mix purified oxygen and purified nitrogen in the proper proportions and pour the mixture into an airtight reactor.

He decided to give it a try.

Chapter 379: Attack

"Move faster!"

"Keep your hands steady. Insert the bullets into the cartridge one at a time!"

"Your teammates at the front need you to act quickly. Otherwise, you'll give the enemy the chance to approach and kill you!"

"Don't look at other places. Stay focused on the job in your hands!"

"As long as your teammates are still shooting, you just keep on reloading!"

In the First Army's military camp, Lord Brian was loudly urging the new recruits to practice, and Nail was one of them.

He was not newly recruited, but instead a veteran in the First Army. After the Militia defeated the demonic beasts under the leadership of His Highness, he joined the army at Iron Head's strong recommendation. In Iron Head's words, it was much more promising to carry a flintlock to fight and protect His Highness and Miss Nana than to spend the rest of his life mining in the pit.

Not long after Nail joined the Militia, they were reorganized into the First Army. Guided by Prince Roland and Lord Iron Axe, the army in which he served defeated not only demonic beasts but also

great nobles whom he used to regard as unbeatable. They overthrew Duke Ryan and even prevented the troops of Timothy, the new king, from setting foot in Border Town. After those battles, Nail was promoted to a team leader in the Flintlock Squad.

However, according to the First Army's tradition, whenever a large number of new recruits came, some veterans would be chosen to join the newly formed platoon. They would live and eat together with the new recruits and accompany them in practices, as their instructors. When he first found out that he had been chosen to be an instructor, Nail was initially unwilling to accept the position. He was reluctant to leave the front line and his familiar battle companions, but thinking of the veterans who had helped him when he was a new recruit in the Militia, he had no choice but to accept this task.

At that time, the instructor in his squad had been Lord Brian, who now was the commander of the First Battalion in the Flintlock Squad.

Nail hoped that one day, he would be someone like Lord Brian, wearing a medal bestowed by His Highness and giving commands to nearly a thousand soldiers. Iron Head was right. "This job is far more promising than operating a steam engine in front of a mining pit."

"My lord, how long do we have to continue with this practice?" A young man in his platoon grumbled. "It's still snowing."

"Keep practicing until you can finish the reloading in about half a minute with your eyes closed," Nail stopped in front of him and

said. "You're Haimon, right? Remember to say 'Report' before you speak. That's a rule in the First Army! "

"Report," shouted a little man next to Haimon, with his hands filling the loader all the time, "do we have eggs for dinner tonight?"

Hearing this question, many soldiers in the platoon started to lick their lips.

Nail could not help but grin. He understood aside from the two weeks' strict military training, sufficient food supply was also an important factor to keep these new soldiers from the Northern and the Southern Territory well disciplined even on such a snowy day. They had oatmeal and salty dried meat for every meal, and sometimes a piece of pickled fish or even an egg. Yet eggs were only provided after a battle against demonic beasts or a field training.

"Well, you'd better ask demonic beasts whether or not they're coming to Border Town today." Nail shrugged. "What's your name?"

"Al Bitter, my lord," answered the little man.

"It takes you almost half a day to insert one bullet. My next-door neighbor, an old lady, is far more nimble than you," Nail suddenly stopped smiling and said seriously. "If you can't improve when today's training is over, I'll cancel your share of oatmeal and meat, let alone the eggs!"

The new soldiers immediately lowered their heads and focused. No one wanted to be punished like that.

Just at the moment, the bell on the city wall tolled rapidly.

Demonic beasts were coming.

"Stop practicing!" Brian shouted, "Instructors lead your men into the city wall area. Get ready to fight!"

"Have you heard it?" Nail urged. "Carry your ammunition, everyone. Line up and go up to the top of the city wall, as what you did in the training. Our position is the fourth section of the city wall. Move quickly!"

"The new soldiers now do get a chance to have eggs for dinner tonight." Nail thought in secret.

...

After arriving at their position, Nail saw the Flintlock Squad was ready. Seeing the dark shadows gradually approaching, he calmly did the last fire check and instructed his men to mount the guns upon the wall piers.

Nail somehow felt a little disappointed. He himself could have given those beasts a hard strike with his revolving rifle.

The bullets were filled into the loaders one by one and then put at handy places that the soldiers at the front could easily reach. There were one to two people responsible for loading behind each veteran. If necessary, the veterans could fire five bullets in a shot. The new weapons were much more powerful than previously-used flintlocks.

"Look! Here comes the witches!" Haimon whispered.

"They're so... pretty." Al Bitter murmured. "Before I came here, I only heard about them via the church and thought they were ugly and dreadful."

"That's the only thing you've noticed?" Haimon grunted. "Don't you remember the witch carrying a big sword? The girl could chop and kill demonic hybrids. Oh! If only I had powers like that."

"If it's truly the power of demons..."

"Shut up!" Nailed shouted loudly. "Miss Nana is also a witch. You think she's a demon?" Then he lowered his voice and said, "Miss Nana is our town's angel. The power she has is the power of gods, understood? If you dare say anything like that in front of any veteran in the First Army, I promise you'll be beaten up really badly. Now focus on the reloading. It's not practice!"

After shouting at the two gabby guys, he cast a glance at the coming demonic beasts, "They look almost the same as the ones that have come before. It appears to be a short battle... Wait, what's that?"

There seemed to be a giant figure among the dark shadows, something like a tortoiseshell Siege Beast, but it seemed much bigger and faster.

When it came closer, Nail could not help but stare at it. It was a super giant demonic beast that he had never ever seen! Its huge tusks were almost thicker than a human's body, like sickles sticking straight up. Its four legs looked like pillars of rock, kicking up layers of snow mists. At each step of its running, the earth beneath its feet trembled. The city walls of more than four meters in height was even lower than its jaw. If the beast ran into the wall, this mud wall would probably crack into pieces.

The artillerymen!

There was no doubt that flintlocks had very limited influence on such a giant monster, but only the big equipment of the artillerymen was able to stop it! The new culverins mounted upon the sixth section of the city walls were the most powerful artillery equipment they had.

At that moment, the new recruits started to scream in fright, "Good God. Look! What's that?"

"Gods have mercy on us. Is it a demon from Hell?"

"Shut your mouth and focus on your job!" Nail swallowed the lump in the throat and looked at the new cannons at the sixth section of the city wall. The barrel, which reflected the silver light,

slowly turned around and projected in the direction of the giant monster.

Then bright flames were shot into the air, and the cannons thundered and boomed!

Chapter 380: Flesh And Blood

Nail felt his heart suddenly leap up his throat.

At that moment, time seemed to slow down. He stared at the giant demonic beast without a blink, while at the same time prayed in secret that the new cannons could hit the target. However, the demonic beast was still safe and sound, rushing forward by the time he started to breathe again.

About half a minute later, a snow column was kicked up far away from the monster.

This is gonna be bad.

Nail's heart suddenly sank. As the monster was not coming toward the sixth section of the city wall, it left an included angle between the cannons. The artillery unit had to constantly adjust the angle of the culverin, while at the same time also estimate how fast the beast was moving and fire in advance. Otherwise, the shell would land somewhere behind the target just like what was happening now.

Based on the firing rate of the field artillery, they only had one last chance before the monster broke into the city wall!

Nail had already been able to see the thick fur that covered the enemy's body, as well as its huge crimson mouth beneath the tusks. Witches were coming in this direction, apparently planning to stop this monster. Yet the four of them together were not even

as big as the beast's leg. Were they able to succeed with pure magic?

He was so anxious and worried that he even wanted to run to the sixth section of the city wall and remind the cannon team to aim forward. However, since there were supervisors standing on both sides at each section of the city wall, he eventually suppressed this impulse—he would be very likely accused of being a coward if he left his post now without permission. Lord Iron Axe had stated repeatedly that behaviors that would break down the line of defense were absolutely forbidden. Once such a person was discovered, the supervising team could directly shoot him down.

The demonic beast running at the very front had already entered the shooting range of the revolving rifles. There was a series of cracking shooting sounds upon the city wall.

Nail had no choice but to continue with his mission, putting the already prepared loaders one by one next to the shooters.

Just at that moment, there was a second ground-shaking roar, which was less than half a minute after the first firing of the culverin.

"That... fast!?" Nail looked at the sixth section of the city wall in great surprise. The smoke above the muzzle had not completely disappeared and some smoke was continuously running out of it, making the cannon look like a litten silver pipe. Nevertheless, what was shocking was yet to come. He had not even had time to notice whether the enemy was shot or not when the dazzling blazes appeared again.

The third firing!

Good Lord. Don't they need to load the shells?

Nail only saw four or five people busy working at the rear of the barrel, but none approaching the muzzle. It appeared that entirely different from the short thick field artillery, this new cannon could fire in succession like a revolving rifle!

This time the firing was effective.

Nail did not see the shell entering the monster's body. What he first noticed was a mass of blood mist bursting out from one side of the giant demonic beast. Aside from the black blood that spilled over, there were also furry skins torn apart, as well as large pieces of flesh. The demonic beast suddenly quivered. Its entire body seemed to be flattened a little bit, and there were streaks of crinkles showing up on its thick furry skins like the ripples on the water surface—but he was not sure whether it was an illusion, because in the next minute, the sunken body restored to normal again, except for the eye balls of the monster, which had been pushed forward when the body was flattened. Meanwhile the eye balls ejected something thick and sluggish in black and white.

With a dull crashing sound, the giant beast fell all its length onto the ground, lying on its side even without an agonal growl. It was until then that Nail found where the shell hit—there was a big hole close to the beast's neck. It was so insignificant compared with its robust body that it was hard to relate the hole with the fatal shot

that occurred just now. Strands of smoke was coming out of the hole, and the furry skins around it were blackened.

The monster from the Hell just died like this?

Nail could no longer restrain the excitement in his heart, but vent out all his earlier anxiety with a roar.

"Long live His Highness!"

Even such a terrifying and fierce enemy could not possibly resist the powerful weapon invented by His Highness! Apart from that new cannon, he could not even think of any other ways to kill this huge hybrid demonic beast—even if a witch could manage to do so, it would not be such a clean shot. Thinking further, he could say that His Highness, in a way, had granted them a supreme power comparable to witches'!

His shout, like an introduction, was responded by more people and it soon created an uproar among others. At first only the new recruits responded with loud shouts, but later even the veterans could not help clenching their fists.

There were loud cheers bursting out from the top of the city walls.

"Long live His Highness!"

Roland was only informed that the beast was killed by the new cannon after the battle was over.

He put on a woolen coat and hurried to the West Wall. The demonic beast's gigantic body was still lying quietly in the snow, with its black blood melting the snow around it into a pool of black water.

It seemed that no matter how horrible these monsters might look like, they were after all carbon based organism. When faced with ammunition and steels, they were as weak as a piece of thin paper.

This solid pointed shell rolled over due to the loss of its stability after being projected into the beast's body, and thus transmitted its kinetic energy throughout the entire torso, and finally went through the body while swirling—as it could be seen from the scene, the other side of the beast's body was completely torn, with the internal organs and broken bones scattered around. Even its head, which was the hardest part of all, was shattered by the vibrating energy and collapsed in total.

However, he still felt a little concerned. "The bone strength of creatures has a limit. This beast is apparently several times bigger than an elephant. How does it support its body without being crushed by its own weight? This is the exactly why terricolous animals have much smaller body builds than marine lives, as they can't overcome the pull of the gravity."

Would it have anything to do with the magic power? He

remembered Nightingale once said she could see there were magic powers flowing inside some of the hybrid demonic beasts' bodies.

"How... could this be possible?" Agatha who arrived later had her eyes wide open, "Isn't this the Fearful Beast of Hell?"

"What's that? Is that the name of the hybrid demonic beast?" Roland asked curiously, "It has also shown up at the Fertile Plains before?"

"Yes, and when they showed up in group, they were difficult enemies to both witches and demons. Many cities and towns were devastated by the Fearful Beasts of Hell," Agatha's voice sounded a little dry, "However, they could only be seen when the arrival of the Bloody Moon was drawing near."

"The arrival of... the Bloody Moon?" Roland suddenly remembered what was written in the ancient book, "When there was a Bloody Moon in the sky, the Gates of Hell would open once again." He frowned and asked, "What does that mean?"

"This was a record passed down since the first Battle of Divine Will when the magic power was the strongest. The appearance of witches would bring another peak in magic power, but likewise, demons and demonic beasts would also be extremely powerful." Agatha said nervously, "I've perused the history book you gave me. Based on the years, I deduce that there're still at least 20 to 50 years before the arrival of the Bloody Moon. It's impossible to see such monsters."

"But it has still appeared," said Roland in a deep voice, "What does it mean?"

"It means that we don't have much time left."

Chapter 381: Evelyn's Resolution

Roland was frightened by the sentence "We don't have much time left", but he was relieved after hearing the full explanation. "Don't stop halfway. It only sounds scary."

"You think five years is a long time?" Agatha frowned and said, "The timing was accurate at the first and the second Battle of the Divine Will. I don't know why the timing of the battle has been quickened and... it might come sooner yet."

"I thought you were about to say the Bloody Moon would come this very winter," Roland shrugged in reply. According to the current research and development plan, he would be able to universalize the use of new firearms throughout the whole army in one year. As long as the enemies were not impervious to blades and spears, they still had a chance to win the war. The only thing he needed to pay attention to was that the construction and development of the territory. It should be developed to the extent of supporting a lasting war. This required the land, population, and resources to all be at a high level of sustainability. That meant the territory must have sufficient foxholes and retreats where people could recover in the face of possible defeat.

Therefore, the primary difficulty did not lie in arms manufacturing itself, but in the establishment of enough industrial cities to be able to consistently provide population, ammunition, and food during a war. Logistics guaranteed a victory, while staff guaranteed logistics. In the end, he found what he needed most was reliable leaders, governors, and clerks. Without these, even if he unified the Kingdom of Graycastle, he would not be able to consolidate it into a war machine, and the nobility would probably

drag him down.

It's indeed true that a country capable of waging a war always has a high level of educated populace.

"What's this weapon called?" Agatha suddenly changed the topic, "Back then, I remember you called it 152mm Stronghold... "

"Stronghold Standard Artillery," Roland added, "There will be naval artilleries in the future."

"If you can fit the city wall with weapons like this prior to the arrival of the Bloody Moon, we probably can resist the attacks from the demons. According to Kyle Sichi, what I made in the chemistry lab is also a part of the cannon, right?" Agatha seemed to be determined and said, "I'll try my best to produce liquid nitrogen and liquid oxygen, as long as you can... "

"Don't worry." He comforted her. "We'll defeat the demons."

"Was this all that I needed to do today?" Evelyn dipped her finger into the wine and then touched it to her tongue. The spicy flavor appeared to be more intense. According to His Highness' requirements, the purer the white liquor was, the better it would taste. The best spirits did not contain any water, and every drop of it was mellow and rich. Although she felt the white liquor she had made was increasingly close to what His Highness described, it

became increasingly further from what could be considered "tasty".

"Yes, good work." The manager of the brewery said while labeling the wine jars. He nodded at her, "Remember me when you are speaking to His Highness."

"Can you... really sell these?" Evelyn asked, confused. From her past experience of running a tavern, she was afraid that only a few people could tolerate such a bold flavor.

"This wine? I don't know," the manager smiled and said, "But, there is someone coming to ship the liquor every now and then, so I think there are still some people who like it."

Evelyn was relieved instantly. If nobody was willing to drink this, not only did His Highness fail, but she herself would become useless as well... It was fortunate that things turned out not to be what she thought it was, and it appeared that His Highness was a true great noble who knew the tastes of nobility very well. She smiled, "I'll take off then."

Evelyn left the brewery and crossed streets that were filled with a bitter and cold wind. Upon returning to the castle, she could feel the warm air greeting her. The world inside the castle was totally different from the one outside. She took a deep breath and removed her coat so she could be closer to the warmth.

This kind of comfortable life was unimaginable in the past. In winter, she used to either sit tightly with her family by a brazier,

or curled up beneath a blanket. "What's the difference between castle life and the Kingdom of God which the church has alleged to be like spring all year round? Besides, His Highness has said that he would popularize the central heating system throughout the residential area, and enable all of his subjects to stay away from the piercing coldness of the Months of the Demons." She had no idea how many believers of the church had arrived at the Kingdom of God, but in here, witches who were considered as Devil's minions, and ordinary civilians were the first to enjoy this privilege. If this fact had reached the ears of the believers, they would probably grit their teeth out of envy.

His Royal Highness is truly capable of everything.

Across the hall, Andrea, Ashes, and Shavi were playing poker.

"Pair of eights!"

"Pass."

"Pair of twos! I win," Andrea smiled proudly and said, "Ashes has the most cards, a total of six. Hand over the IOU for ice cream!" Then she turned around and waived at Evelyn, "Hey, do you want to play with us?"

Out of curiosity, Evelyn could not help asking, "What's an IOU for ice cream?"

"It's a bet," Ashes waived her hand and continued, "Whoever has

the most IOUs will have to give up her next ice cream bread to the winner. How does that sound? Do you want to give it a shot?"

Evelyn was very hesitant. "This was a rare chance for her to make conversation with combat witches. If it was on the Sleeping Island, both Andrea and Ashes would be figures only next to Lady Tilly, who was rarely ever seen, and they would certainly not invite her to join in their activities voluntarily. Besides, Fighting the Landlord is indeed very interesting, it has simple rules but numerous variations, and it also requires teamwork. One can easily spend the whole day just playing it. However..."

"Um, it'll be the final exam soon. Don't you need to review?"

"Do you mean the exam for that basic course this evening?" Andrea pouted and said, "It's very simple. I can probably pass without much studying."

The other two agreed with a nod.

Right... Andrea is nobility, so, her insight and knowledge is greater than that of ordinary people. Both Ashes and Shavi can read and write. It appears now that she's the one that falls behind.

"I... I might as well not play," she hesitated for a moment and then said, "I'd better get back to my room and do some reading. You guys please continue without me."

Leaving the three people who were a little surprised behind,

Evelyn rushed to Witch House. She pushed the wooden door open and found Candle sitting at the table in the living room practicing the arithmetic exercises in the back of the textbook.

"You're back?"

"Yes." Seeing Candle hard at work, she felt a lot of relief at once. "How did your revision go?"

"Not bad. Nature and arithmetic are a little hard to understand," Candle smiled and said. "How about you?"

"Me too," Evelyn nodded and said, "Let's make a list of all the things that we don't understand and ask Miss Anna in the evening."

"Sounds good."

According to Miss Scroll, these books were written by the Royal Highness himself, and they were based on his existing knowledge. If she mastered them, did that mean she would also possess one part of his almightiness? Evelyn thought in secret that although she couldn't change the ability she was born with, at least she could progress in this regard by working hard. Even if the nobles no longer liked to drink spicy white liquor, she could still work as a teacher in the territory rather than being useless. To this end, she pretty much read her textbook and studied those difficult phrases and equations whenever she had time. This had made her a frequent visitor to Anna', Scroll' and Wendy's rooms.

She had the lowest score during the last test, but she firmly believed that that would not be the case this time.

"Let me set an achievable goal first—I want to exceed Maggie!" she thought to herself.

Chapter 382: Final Exam

The day of the final exam soon arrived.

In the hall, the witches sat in neat rows as they waited for Teacher Scroll to distribute the test papers.

Meanwhile, Andrea was elegantly trimming her nails with a clipper. She was already thinking about dinner—according to His Highness Roland, the first semester of school would conclude as soon as the exam was over. To celebrate, every student would receive a roll of ice cream bread for dinner.

This meant that Andrea would receive much more than one roll.

In recent days, she would play "Fight the Landlord" with Ashes and Shavi whenever she was free. This game of tactics and technique was somewhat similar to beasts chess, which used to be popular among the upper-class nobility. In both games, the key was to make use of one's advantages and hide one's weaknesses, and deep planning was required. She would often brag about never having lost a game of "Fight the Landlord" to Lady Tilly and, even more so, Ashes, and she was indeed telling the truth. At the moment, she was owed six rolls of ice cream bread, of which four were from Ashes and two were from Shavi. In other words, whenever His Highness arranged this delicacy as dessert, the two of them would have to give their portions to Andrea.

It was going to be a "bumper harvest" for Andrea. She would be able to enjoy three rolls of ice cream bread for dinner, which would

be finally enough to satiate her craving.

Naturally, she was also confident about the exam.

As soon as she heard that there would be an exam, she asked Sylvie about the previous test and even attempted the questions on her own. She realized that the test was very simple and was basically equivalent to the basic education for nobility. The test paper was mainly about recognizing words and phrases, and there were also a few simple arithmetic calculations of profit and loss, which were not as difficult as accounting problems, let alone family finance calculations. She was widely known as her family's prodigy in this area, and at the age of 15, she was already able to check her family's account books.

The true way of the nobility was to do everything to one's best.

The test papers were soon distributed.

Andrea took a quick look through the paper and raised her head. The test consisted of three question sheets, which were each labeled separately as "Kingdom Language", "Basic Arithmetic", and "Elementary Nature".

Great, exactly the same as last time.

She grinned uncontrollably as she opened the "Kingdom Language" question sheet and began writing with her goose quill pen immediately.

Within 15 minutes, she completed the questions on the first sheet. Although the range of vocabulary was greater than that of the previous time, and there were a few unexpected segments such as "reading comprehension" and "filling in the blanks", the test remained easy for her. "Well, it's just answering the questions after comprehending the passage and completing the sentences. It only looks confusing, but it's quite simple."

The next sheet was "Basic Arithmetic".

The front segment comprised of simple calculations of profit and loss, but gradually, Andrea's progress slowed down.

"What does 'Use an equation to describe two intersecting lines with a few dots above them.' mean?"

Her heart suddenly clenched. She began to have the feeling she got when she read Natural Science Theoretical Foundation. "Why is it that I can understand the words separately, but not when they're connected?"

This was also the case for the subsequent questions.

Andrea started to sweat profusely.

She took a deep breath and held it in her chest. Then, she turned towards Nightingale, who was seated in the back row. "As a fellow noble, can she give me some hints?"

But Nightingale's facial expression shocked Andrea.

Nightingale was staring dully at her test paper while holding her goose quill pen in her mouth. She did not shift her gaze for a long time.

Are the questions also difficult for her?

Lady Tilly did not attend the exam, while the legendarily gifted Miss Anna was also nowhere to be seen. Andrea saw that most of the witches were still stuck on the first page and unable to answer the questions.

After another 15 minutes, everyone flipped to the second question sheet. Even though they were much slower than Andrea for the first sheet, they did not stop writing even for a brief moment on the second sheet, and even Maggie was writing furiously. "Oh dear, Maggie doesn't even hold the pen properly and looks as though she's clawing the pen in her fist, yet she's able to answer the questions?"

Andrea felt entirely helpless. Pretending that she had completed the "Basic Arithmetic" sheet, she flipped to the final sheet, "Elementary Nature".

Compared to the previous test's straightforward question-and-answer format, there were numbers and incomprehensible symbols this time. "Wait... this requires calculation as well?"

She suddenly began to feel that things were not going according to what she had anticipated.

The only relief was that Ashes had stopped writing a long time ago, apparently because she was equally stumped by the questions.

"But... what the heck," she thought, "what joy is there in beating a meathead?"

Amidst her anxiety, she heard Teacher Scroll announce the end of the exam. Slumping back in her chair, she watched as the teacher took her test paper away, and she felt that her three rolls of ice cream bread for dinner were no longer that sweet.

"Your Highness, here are all of the test papers." Scroll placed a stack of paper on Roland's office table. "Are you sure that you want to mark them yourself?"

"Indeed." Roland smiled. "Sometimes, reading test papers is a form of pleasure."

For example, he could read their bizarre answers, or discover the test takers' anguish and suffering by reading between the lines. These served as spiritual food during his leisure time.

"Shall I collate the scores for you?"

"Yes, sorry to trouble you." Roland nodded, and then he shouted, "Nightingale, no peeping."

"You knew." From the couch, Nightingale revealed her form and smiled. "Why doesn't Anna have to attend the exam? Isn't it the end of the semester? All sisters of the Witch Union should have to take the test."

Roland burst into laughter uncontrollably. "Because this test was formulated by Teacher Scroll and her."

Nightingale kept silent for a long while before she asked, "How about your younger sister?"

"Lady Tilly? She helped review the test paper and took the exam beforehand in order to check for errors." The prince spread his arms. "By the way, she got full marks."

Nightingale's shadow appeared to grow heavier.

Roland shook his head and started to mark the papers.

...

After all of the scores had been collated, Roland stretched his sluggish body. The Sleeping Island witches showed considerable

improvement this time. Candle, Evelyn and Sylvie all passed the exam, and among them, it was Evelyn who improved the most. Although she had the lowest score among the trio in the previous exam, she improved from 5 to 62 marks this time, undoubtedly because she had put in a great amount of effort.

Conversely, the three combat witches who had recently arrived attained low scores, none of which went above 50 marks. This was understandable because they had spent a much shorter time in the classroom and their scores for "Kingdom Language" were assigned a relatively low weight.

However, it was Nightingale who fared the most terribly. Although she had attended class with everyone else, her total score was less than her last test's. Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry. "It appears that learning ability is indeed a natural gift that can't be forced."

The only one who surprised him was Maggie.

Although she was not able to solve more than a handful of calculation problems in the "Basic Arithmetic" and "Elementary Nature" sections, she correctly answered most of the multiple-choice and true-or-false questions and ultimately scored 63 marks, which Roland found rather unbelievable.

"How did she manage it?"

Roland could not think of a reason.

Chapter 383: The Bite

Inside the Tower of Babel at Hermes Cathedral.

The newly-crowned Supreme Pontiff, Mayne, was quietly listening to the reports of the three Bishops in the secret room.

Aside from the elder Bishop Tayfun, the other two were newly-promoted Archbishops, Soli Darl and Ell, who came from the Verdict Army and Tribunal respectively. The former had been a gallant and heroic Presiding Judge who had gained a stellar reputation over the course of more than 25 years of service in the army, and the latter had been Heather's adjutant and was also widely respected.

"The intake of orphans from the Kingdom of Everwinter has been very successful during this year's Months of Demons. The nobles of every major city have fully yielded to the church. At present, the number of orphans sent to the Holy City is already three times more than the planned," Tayfun said with a sigh. "This is the only piece of good news recently."

The nobles were always like this—as soon as they saw that the situation was not advantageous to them, they would change sides faster than they drank water. Mayne nodded and replied, "This is only the first year, and there will be more and more in the future. If we're able to take over the whole continent, our yearly intake could fill up an entirely new city."

"I hope so." Tayfun sighed deeply. "How many times has this

place been attacked by demonic beasts since the heavy snow began to fall?"

"Six times," Soli replied.

"Six times... and hundreds of Verdict Warriors have already died on the frontline," Tayfun said in a heavy tone. "The God's Punishment Army has also lost ten of its personnel, and the demonic beasts' offensive will only become fiercer next year."

"This is easier than fighting the demons," Ell said and gestured with his hands. "Although I haven't personally witnessed the might of the demons, the Holy Book describes them as invincible. Is it really necessary to defend this place to the death?"

"What on earth do you mean?!" Soli frowned upon hearing Ell's words. "God gives us our direction and strength. As his disciples, how can we not stick to our faith and run away instead?"

"Stop quarreling," Mayne said, thumping his scepter on the ground. "After working with Heather for more than ten years, Ell has been affected by her loose-lipped temperament." As he watched Soli and Ell bicker, he could not help thinking about the partnership between Tayfun and Heather in the old times. He glanced at the old Bishop, only to discover that the latter was glancing back at him, as if they were thinking about the same thing. "Our ultimate goal is to sustain the human race, and the only way to do so is to defeat our enemies."

"Understood, Your Holiness." The two Bishops bowed their heads

in respect.

Although, even he himself was not sure if they could defeat the demons by maintaining their position and defending Hermes.

Mayne suddenly thought about O'Brien's entrustment and felt his shoulders grow heavy.

The Fearful Beasts of Hell had already appeared, and the demons would arrive in five years. Mayne would get to witness the next Battle of Divine Will while he was alive, but unlike O'Brien, he would not be able to entrust his duties to a successor. He could neither sleep nor eat well whenever he thought about this.

In truth, he had also thought about leaving a way out for himself. When Garcia's Blacksail Fleet was captured, Mayne did not order the ships to be burned nor execute all of the rebels, but instead locked them behind bars. Apart from executing a few of the fleet leaders together with a large number of scapegoats who were actually commoners living in the slums, most of the fleet crew were kept alive and were presently locked up in the harbor of the Kingdom of Everwinter by Mayne's most trusted subordinates.

If the defensive line is completely broken, the Fjords will become the final refuge—even though retreating to those islands will mean that Mankind is near extinction and has no chance of redemption, at least I'll be able to live out the rest of my life.

After all, hasn't Mankind already done everything it could and not been able to defeat its enemies in two attempts?"

In the subsequent discussions regarding how the church should expand and how to stabilize the governance of the Kingdom of Wolfheart, Mayne did not pay much attention. He waited until the three bishops finished discussing before saying absent-mindedly, "We'll do as you three have said. That'll be it for today's meeting."

"Yes, Your Holiness." The three bishops hurriedly stood up and bowed.

Mayne left the secret room and made his way towards the Pivotal Secret Area together with his guards.

According to the plan, a new batch of Verdict Army soldiers were to be converted to members of the God's Punishment Army today. This was what he was truly concerned about. Whether it was standing their ground or retreating, these powerful warriors were guaranteed to follow his orders.

However, before this, he had to handle another problem.

He passed through the stone steps and entered the Pivotal Secret Area. Then, he turned into the long prison corridor that was situated in the middle of the area. The last time he was here, it was to secretly execute the King of Graycastle, Wimbledon III.

The long corridor was extremely deserted. The rosin torches that were placed on both sides of the corridor emitted a dim yellow light. The far end of the corridor was covered in darkness as if it was the entrance to a bottomless abyss. Many people who had been

imprisoned here never saw sunlight ever again.

Mayne walked towards cell No. 85 and signaled to his guards to open the door.

The thick wooden door gave out a harsh grinding sound. Then, fits of wailing and crying were suddenly heard. When the cell door was closed again, these fits were shut out on the outside.

Through the iron railings, Mayne saw Zero's figure.

The Pure Witch's back was facing the entrance. Her upper body was bare, while she was handcuffed to an iron bar overhead that forced her to tiptoe at all times. A dozen fresh lash marks were visible on her white-skinned back, but the streams of blood that flowed downwards had already solidified.

"How does the tribunal's Sermon Whip feel?" Mayne asked. "I hope that this teaches you the meaning of obedience."

"Uh..." Zero groaned softly as if she had just awakened from a dream and turned her head meekly. "So the Supreme Pontiff has come. Do you mean obedience towards you, or towards other bishops?"

Her frivolous tone made Mayne frown. However, his displeasure diminished when he reminded himself that he was currently the Supreme Pontiff, which was very different from his previous position as a bishop. "After this lesson, she should understand that

I can decide whether she lives or dies." "Obedience towards me. And when I ask you to assist another bishop to complete a mission, you have to obey his orders."

"Is that all?" She asked noncommittally. "If this is what you demand, I'll agree to it."

"Release her handcuffs," Mayne ordered a guard.

Having been handcuffed up high for a long time, Zero's hands seemed to be dislocated, and they dropped down as though they did not have an ounce of energy left. The Pope picked up Zero's clothes using his scepter and tossed them on her shoulder. "I have a task for you. Follow me."

Zero allowed her clothes to dangle on her shoulder and nonchalantly followed Mayne out of the long prison corridor.

"This year's Months of Demons could be as long as five months. This is a daunting challenge for the Holy City, and even more so for other places that are affected by the Months of Demons." Mayne walked to the border of the Trap Area, and then passed through a narrow iron-walled passageway and arrived in front of the elevator cage once again. Ever since he was crowned as the Pope, he had been busy with the various matters of the church. This was the first time he stepped foot in this place as the ruler. "I order you to follow the other Pure Witches to the Kingdom of Graycastle and kill the rebels Timothy and Roland Wimbledon by taking advantage of the disorder brought about by the heavy snow. Is that understood?"

As the door of the elevator cage closed, the clicking sound of the capstan rotation was heard overhead and the elevator began to descend slowly. But Mayne didn't hear Zero's reply.

"Damn, the whipping hasn't taught her to obey." With a sullen face, Mayne turned to look at Zero, only to see her smiling with a dangerous glint in her eyes.

Then, he saw a beam of bright light heading straight at him.

Chapter 384: Sin And Redemption

After the darkness disappeared, Mayne found himself standing in an empty square.

Everything in front of him seemed vaguely familiar... short houses, a monastery still in construction, and a new stone church. The dirt floor was dry and firm without a trace of snow, the sun was peeking through the clouds, and a warm breeze kissed his cheek. It didn't feel like the Months of the Demons at all.

"Wait." He suddenly realized. "Was this the old Holy City where I first became a believer? At that moment, His Holiness O'Brien was hosting a cleansing ritual on the square."

"So this is the most prominent place in your memories," said Zero coldly from behind him. "It's a pretty nice place."

The Pure Witch!

His fragmented memories suddenly came together, and he felt a fit of rage come over him. He turned around and glared straight at her. "Zero, are you insane?!"

How dare she use her powers against me!

Also, why doesn't the God's Stone of Retaliation that I wear have any effect?

"I know exactly what I'm doing." Zero smiled. "It's you... who is still confused. It's alright. There's more than enough time in your subconscious world for me to explain this to you."

Mayne was familiar with Zero's power of the Soul Battlefield, which allowed her to battle the possessed victim using only her mind, and the victor would gain everything, while the defeated would lose it all. This was an extremely rare type of summoning power and could only be resisted by God's Stone of Retaliation. "But... damn it! I'm clearly wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation!"

He reached into his pocket and took out the blue crystal, the silhouette of which reflected a cerulean light under the sun, showing no defects.

"Why?" Mayne asked, gnashing his teeth.

"Are you talking about the Stone?" Zero smiled. "Basically, its sphere of influence has been removed. Of course, a mortal won't be able to feel the difference."

"Its influence has been removed?" The Pope couldn't help but stare. "There's only one person in the entire Holy City who can counter the effects of God's Stone of Retaliation, and that's the Pure Witch Isabella."

This is... blatant betrayal!

"These b*tches!" A vein throbbed on Mayne's forehead, and his

hands shook with anger. "If I knew how unreliable these tools were, I would have added them to the God's Punishment Army when I was appointed!" He tried to control his temper and said bitterly, "When did this happen?"

"How could I know when she struck, since you put me in a cell to teach me a lesson?" Zero shrugged. "I only asked her to do it and that's all."

"You asked! If you hadn't been planning this for a long time, how could she do such a blasphemous thing so easily?" "No." His heartbeat suddenly stopped. "Even the two of them wouldn't be able to pull this off..." After he became the Pope, he moved into the bedroom that used to belong to His Holiness O'Brien, which had all kinds of booby traps and Verdict Warriors standing guard at all times. Not to mention there were Advanced Magic Stones by his bed, which he carried with him every day, and guards followed him everywhere. How did they manage to find an opportunity to strike?

Mayne was so angry that he actually grew eerily calm. "What do you want? Are you doing this just to get back at me for my punishment? Even if you kill me, the entire cave below your cage is the influence area of God's Stones, so you have nowhere to run. As soon as the elevator stops, you'll be spotted and captured by the waiting Verdict Warriors. Don't even dream of escaping this cell, because when they start interrogating you, you'll feel like the days of whipping is just tickles to you."

"I don't want to escape." Zero shook her head. "I want to replace you and become the Pope."

"..." Mayne was stunned. He had predicted all kinds of reasons, but he never expected to hear this answer. "A Pure Witch as the Pope? You have quite an imagination, since I'm the one who was crowned as the Pope in front of all our believers! If you kill me, do you think they would accept you?"

"I don't need to appear in front of everyone because I can just have a 'mouthpiece' to act as the Pope," said Zero unconcernedly. "See, His Holiness O'Brien also stayed in the Pivotal Secret Temple most of the time and would wear a mask on the rare occasions he came out. Under these circumstances, who could tell that the Pope was actually someone else?"

"You won't be able to keep up your ruse for long! Didn't you hear what I just said? As soon as your cage hits the ground, when the Verdict Warriors realize I'm not here, they'll immediately arrest you!" Mayne roared. "If you let me out right now, I can still forget that you ever did such a reckless thing!"

"As soon as the Battle of Souls begins, it won't ever end," said Zero with a smile. "Also, you were wrong from the beginning, because they won't arrest me."

"Won't arrest her... What does that mean?" The Pope stared at the Pure Witch's eyes with a frown and tried to see what she was thinking, but her eyes only shined with excitement and didn't reveal a trace of fear or panic. She didn't avert her eyes and instead stared calmly at him, as if she was saying a completely normal thing.

Mayne suddenly felt a bolt of electricity flash through his mind!

"Even giving up... may also be a wise choice."

"I'm sorry, child."

He opened his mouth, but he felt that his throat was choked by a pair of large hands and couldn't make a sound. He felt his heart sink, as if it fell into a pool of icy water. After a long time, he said with great difficulty: "Is this all O'Brien..."

"So you finally understand." Zero arched her eyebrows. "The Supreme Pontiff has given orders to all the guards and Verdict Warriors in the Pivotal Secret Temple—they'll never leave their position below ground and will only listen to the Pope. You accepted the scepter above ground, but you don't have the control of the Pivotal Secret Temple yet." She chuckled quietly. "Think about it. We're currently above the cave and the core organization of the church, as well as the only place free from the guards above ground and from the influence of God's Stone of Retaliation. Don't you agree that this is the perfect arena?"

The Pure Witch stopped smiling, and her eyes flashed like dancing flames. "This is the battlefield His Holiness arranged for us, so whoever survives will become the true ruler of the church."

"How... how could this be?" Mayne felt his throat dry up. "This stupid old man. Is he doing this to repent for his sins of taking the power that belonged originally to witches? How absurd!"

The flames in Zero's eyes were clearly from ambition, an emotion that was rarely seen in Pure Witches—they were trained as tools since birth and were all supposed to be unwaveringly loyal to church officials. "If we hadn't conquered those reckless... No, shoot!" Mayne suddenly remembered what His Holiness said to him before invading the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

"I'm sending two Pure Witches to fight alongside you. No one can escape their wrath."

Why didn't he ever consider how acquiring the memories of the King of Wolfheart and the Queen of Clearwater would affect Zero?

As he recalled O'Brien's relieved expression in his last hour, he finally understood the meaning behind his dying words. Mayne gritted his teeth furiously. "How did the old man not consider this issue? He had already been preparing for the ambition to return to the Pure Witch's heart."

Is this the ending you hoped to see, Supreme Pontiff?!

Chapter 385: Cause And Effect

"Don't be so upset, Lord Mayne." Zero held her hands behind her back and slowly circled the square. "The church was originally founded by the Union anyway, so His Holiness only did this so that the witches could get back what was theirs. If you win, you can also get my memories and experiences—wealth I accumulated over the past 200 years."

"I see. Letting Zero use the Reflection Church was already strange because even if she were the Pope's favorite, she was still a Pure Witch and shouldn't have been given access to the church's deepest secrets. Unfortunately, I didn't realize this soon enough." Mayne was silent for a while before saying, "If you win, where do you plan to lead the church to?"

"To victory," she said, raising her head, "or destruction... just not towards the Fjord Islands."

"W... what?"

"You think no one knows about your secret orders?" Zero's tone contained a trace of mockery. "Right before a great battle, you sent resources to the port of Kingdom of Everwinter to repair ships and support sailors. Plus, you sent a large number of scapegoats to the gallows. These are all costly expenses, practically impossible to hide from the church."

"Shoot, O'Brien even entrusted her with the Pivotal Secret Area's intelligence agency." He thought silently. "That doesn't prove

anything! As the Pope, I need to think in the long-term to ensure that the church survives under any circumstances."

"Do you even believe your own words?" Zero laughed. "Right after you accepted the scepter in front of all those believers, you started thinking about your own future, and you lost your will to win the Battle of Divine Will before it even began—do you think a mortal like you can earn the approval of God?"

"What approval of God?" Mayne couldn't help but scream. "If his approval was really protecting us, why were the humans suffering defeat after defeat?" He panted heavily and rasped. "Meanwhile, we need to rely on God's Punishment Army to battle the demons, so time is of the essence, and there's nothing you can do to change that."

"No, not just God's Punishment Army," whispered Zero. "The fate of mankind shouldn't rest in the hands of a few people."

"Are we supposed to count on you witches?" Mayne chuckled coldly. "Don't forget that it was your kind who failed us 400 years ago!"

"The witches are also only a small group." She stopped walking and stared directly at the Pope, her eyes chilling him to the core. "This battle will decide the survival of all of the mankind, so everyone needs to be involved—men, women, the elderly and children will all become honored warriors and join the fight against the demons, or else... they'll all die."

"That's absurd. You plan to send those civilians who are scared senseless by demonic beasts against actual demons? You must be out of your mind..." Mayne suddenly stopped, as he realized she wasn't joking and was seriously sharing her plans with him. "The only way to give civilians the ability to fight was..."

"You want to feed all of them Pills of Madness?" He asked in disbelief.

"One enchanted person is no match for a God's Punishment Warrior, but what about ten?" Zero turned her head and asked. "Not only is there currently a steady supply of demonic beasts running rampant, but the Pivotal Secret Area might also be able to invent a few new formulas. Five years later, the church will have a supply of around three to four million pills. What does this mean?" She paused. "It means that besides God's Punishment Army, the Holy City can also send out an army of millions of maddened men to participate in the battle against demons."

"You're... insane!"

"Insane? You're the insane one for not taking the Battle of Doomsday seriously!" The Pure Witch suddenly roared. "Both the Union and the church used small groups to fight against their enemy's full force, which is why they failed. No one is exempt from this battle, and mortals can't hide behind God's Punishment Army or witches forever—as I said, this is a fateful battle that requires everyone's full efforts, otherwise we won't be able to contend with the demons in the Barbarian Land!"

A Pure Witch raised by the church would never say such a thing

because this was the mentality of a conqueror. Mayne's face grew pale. "You are... an absolute mutt!"

Your Holiness O'Brien, did you really foresee all of this?

"Accepting knowledge is a part of the process of self-change, and only the exchange of thoughts can bring progress." Zero inhaled sharply. "Perhaps we should stop chatting and decide who the ruler of the church should be."

"Don't bet on winning," said the Pope through gritted teeth. "I built this world!"

As soon as he finished speaking, Red Mist appeared at his feet and began to spread. Zero seemed slightly taken aback. Suddenly, she grasped her throat and screamed a tortured cry, her face curling up like orange peels, falling off in chunks, and spewing blood everywhere, soon losing its human form.

"This is the demonic mist hidden in the Pivotal Area's traps and only affects witches with magic power," said Mayne bitterly through the Red Mist. "If I fill the entire square with it, you'll be left to suffer endlessly and die a thousand times!"

"Is that so?" A gust of wind suddenly cleared all the Red Mist around the Pure Witch, and the reborn Zero said painfully, "Of course, the new Pope has some tricks up his sleeve. If you headed straight to the library of the Pivotal Secret Temple in the beginning, this battle would be even more difficult—but this is also the fun part of the Battle of Souls.

"Is that... a Stone of Windpower?" Mayne noticed a ring with a green crystal on her finger. "The stone's area of influence is limited, so as long as I keep my distance, I can break this shield with a God's Stone of Retaliation bolt. But just to be safe, I should make some preparations." He racked his brain, created two Pills of Madness, and swallowed them.

"Oh, smart idea," said Zero with a grin. "Your biggest weakness is in your fighting ability, so the duo-colored pill can increase your strength, agility, and pain tolerance, so it's much harder for me to attack you from afar with weapons such as crossbow bolts."

Mayne ignored her, moved to an area unaffected by the Magic Stone, and focused on creating a God's Stone of Retaliation. The Pills of Madness were kicking in, and he felt his strength increase rapidly and sight become very clear. When he created the God's Stone of Retaliation, it would make the most effective weapon against the witch, and she would die of erosion by the Red Mist if she tried to attack him.

She's also making her own weapon—what is it? A pair of long swords?

It makes sense to have bolts, but what does she need swords for?" Also, the structure of the swords is very strange, with a blade as broad as her torso and encrusted with many crystals, seeming strangely familiar.

Zero raised the weapons in her hands. "Do you know? In the

Illusion Room of the Reflection Church, there is more than one recorded image."

What does that mean?

"Did you forget what His Holiness O'Brien said? Alice's battle with Natalia was completely recorded by the Union," she said carefully. "Besides absorbing memories, watching and learning are also talents of mine."

As she said this, the crystals on the swords lit up one by one, as if they were signaling something. And then a bright golden light emerged from the swords and ripped through the Red Mist, shooting straight into the sky. The sky also seemed to respond to this power by shooting down thousands of bolts of light.

"What... kind of ability is this?" Mayne stared in shock.

Before getting the answer, he was surrounded by an engulfing golden light, which seemed to tear the entire world apart.

The cage fell slowly to the bottom of the God's Stone cave.

Zero threw the clothes on her shoulder onto the ground and walked out of the cage. The scars from whippings had all disappeared from her back, as if they had never been there.

The Verdict Warrior standing guard lowered his head respectfully and handed her a prepared golden robe—the clothing signaling the highest authority in the Church.

With the help of many attendants, Zero put on the baggy robe and walked straight to the Pivotal Secret Temple, not sparing even a single glance ba.

Chapter 386: A Different Story

After a busy week, Roland built a new chemical factory next to the Redwater River. Considering the toxicity of nitrogen oxide, this factory was built like the Convenience Market, with a gaping wall and wooden roof, a one-story tall gap in the middle, and awful ventilation. Of course, the temperature inside was pretty much the same with that outside.

The new oxygen and nitrogen synthesizing system was already in use. The heat produced instantaneously by the Blackfire was the same as an electric arc and was much more efficient. After the raw materials were placed into the reactor, Anna only needed 8 minutes to turn them into nitrogen dioxide, which produced nitric acid when combined with water.

The system that synthesized ammonia from nitrogen and hydrogen was also in full swing—the amount of liquid nitrogen resolved from cooling was much larger than the amount of liquid oxygen, so the leftover nitrogen was used to produce ammonia. Roland also did not cease the regular industrial production of nitric acid so that he could cover all his bases. Every new production line for nitric acid was an opportunity for more chemical explosives.

According to the test on Paper's abilities, he found that she truly could speed up a heated nitrogen and hydrogen reaction to the extent that it seemed like the results were instantaneous. The problem remained that she still could not control the release of her magic power, and her young age made her consume the little power she had very quickly.

However, this could be fixed through practice. According to Wendy, the girl was improving quickly, and she would be able to maintain her power at a basically stable level in about a week.

With these two production lines and a stable glycerol nitrification output, achieving modern smokeless powder became possible. The next step was to design a repeating firearm and begin producing it as soon as possible.

Roland was just thinking about his design for the new weapon when a guard walked into his office and reported, "Sir Ferlin Eltek and his father Duke Eltek are here to see you and are waiting in the lobby."

"Ferlin?" He pondered for a while. "Wasn't he the first knight of the Western Region, Kingdom of Dawn? All his family should be at Longsong Stronghold. Why is he suddenly in Border Town?" Did they mention why they were here?"

"Sir Ferlin said it had something to do with witches and told me to give this to you." The guard handed him a piece of delicate parchment depicting the treasure map previously drawn by Morning Light, but compared with the previous rough draft, this map almost seemed to be printed.

Roland suddenly remembered that Ferlin once said this map had been passed down in his family for 400 years, and that Lightning used it to find the stone tower where Agatha was being held.

He was suddenly very interested. "Go summon Agatha; she should still be in the chemical lab right now. I'll go and see them right away."

"Yes, Your Highness."

After the guard left, Roland rolled up the map and went to the lobby.

Ferlin and an old man immediately stood up and bowed in respect.

The prince noticed that both men were wearing thick leather jackets with sweat stains on their shoulders, and the old man's forehead was already brimming with sweat. He smiled and said, "If it's too hot, you can take off your coats. There's heating in the castle, so it's much warmer in here than it's outside. Don't make yourself sick."

"Heating?" Ferlin was stunned.

"It's a new type of heating equipment that's much better than a fireplace." Roland didn't waste time on explaining and instead directed the subject to his visitors' intentions. "I heard you came because of the witches?"

"Yes, Your Highness," said Morning Light, nodding furiously. "I met a woman with blue hair at the Convenience Market..." He briefly summarized his experience during the past few days.

"When I returned home, my father told me about my family's history, and I thought that she might be a witch."

"I see." Roland was shocked to hear his story. He didn't think that Agatha's family had any mortals who survived till now. "There's such a witch at Border Town, and her name is Agatha indeed."

Duke Eltek bolted out of his chair in excitement. "Then could Your Highness..."

"Let you meet her?" Roland nodded with a smile. "Of course, she should be on her way to the castle right now. Also, considering that she's a witch, I think you should do her the courtesy of taking off that God's Stone of Retaliation you're wearing."

"Ah, you're right." The Duke hastily removed the stone from his shirt and placed it on the table.

"There was no such courtesy in Taquila 400 years ago, and witches weren't hunted like animals by the church yet," Nightingale whispered in his ear. "This stone is nothing but research material for Agatha."

"This way, you can determine whether they're telling the truth or not," Roland said, hiding his smile.

He felt Nightingale lightly pinch his neck.

"Liar."

...

"Why do you summon me back?" Agatha pushed through the lobby door and demanded. "The Battle of Divine Will is looming and I need all the time I have to produce weapons to fight... in battle." She fought down the word "demons" when she noticed the strangers. "If it isn't important, you can just send someone to tell me."

After working with the Chief Alchemist for a long time, she started to sound a little like Kyle Sichi, and her tireless attitude in serving Border Town's production industries made the town leader Roland feel a little guilty. He cleared his throat, "Ahem, this is a very important matter. Do you remember, when Taquila was on the verge of collapse 400 years ago, that one group of servants was separated from you and followed the masses to the south of the Impassable Mountain Range?"

"I think so." Agatha took off her hat, which was covered in snow, and tossed her blue hair. "What kind of important matter is this? It happened a long time ago."

When she showed her full appearance, Ferlin and the Duke gasped, and the Duke immediately kneeled in front of her. "You really are Lady Agatha!"

"And you are... ?" Agatha frowned.

"I'm a descendant of Kagar. Do you still remember that name?"

The Duke asked, looking up expectantly.

"Kagar... of course. I gave him that name." She shrugged her shoulders. "I purchased two mortal servants and named one Kaff, who was the head of my family guards, and the other Kagar, who was my housekeeper." She paused slightly. "So you're the descendants of that housekeeper who snuck away with my Magic Stones and experiment notes?"

"Snuck... away?" The Duke stared in shock. "No, he..."

"Get out." Agatha's face darkened. "I don't ever want to see you again."

Chapter 387: Inheritance

The witch left the hall as soon as she was finished talking and gave the two men no time to explain.

Roland turned his head slightly. "Can you tell what's going on?"

"Both sides are telling the truth," Nightingale whispered in his ear.

Roland pondered this for a bit and quickly guessed what had really happened. What was spoken truthfully wasn't necessarily the truth, but only what one thought was true. It seemed that the issue lay in their family history book.

"Since you came all this way from Longsong Stronghold, don't go back so soon. Stay in Ferlin's house for a couple of days and tour the scenery of this town." Roland turned to the confused Duke. "I'll try to reason with her, and maybe you will get to talk again."

"Is that... is that true?" The knight was shocked, but he bowed his head and said, "Then I must trouble Your Highness."

"By the way, where are the Magic Stones and ancient books that you brought?"

"There're more than ten boxes on our boat."

"Great, let's bring them all to the castle," Roland said, nodding. "I think she'll soften up a little after seeing all of her things that survived for over 400 years."

...

After dinner, the Prince called Agatha to his office.

"You should give Duke Eltek a chance to explain himself." He told her the Duke's entire story. "No matter what your housekeeper did, this man is trying to return your belongings to you, and he may even be trying to right his ancestor's wrongs."

"My housekeeper deceived his descendants, so this man doesn't owe me anything." Agatha pouted. "Also, witch families mean nothing now. They belong to the nobility of the Western Region, right? If I accept them, it would make things difficult for you, because you want to seize all the ruling authority of the Western Region for yourself, don't you?"

Roland was shocked that she even considered this issue, and he shook his head with a smile. "Alright, that makes sense. But you don't seem to blame them."

"I shouldn't place my anger towards a mortal from 400 years ago onto his descendants, especially if they don't know what happened."

"Spoken like a true enlightened member of the witches' kingdom!"

Roland thought. "Whether it is towards mortals or accepting new things, she always has a positive outlook. To me, this is no doubt an outstanding mindset, but it was probably a rare one in Taquila, so it's no surprise that she was rejected by other witches in the Quest Society."

"In that case, I'll explain it to them," he said, smiling. "Do you have any interest in going through your belongings?"

Agatha rolled her eyes and scoffed, "They're not mine. They're the Quest Society's belongings."

...

All the boxes were brought to the castle basement. Beside Agatha, Roland also invited Tilly, Sylvie, and Anna.

The boxes were opened one by one under Sylvie's watch—ten out of the fifteen boxes contained Magic Stones. Roland picked up a fist-sized crystal and clicked his tongue. "You said that they were all transformed from God's Stone of Retaliation, so a stone this big must be worth 200 or 300 gold royals."

"200 or 300 gold royals?" Agatha said, unimpressed, "Magic Stones can only be produced by Chaos Beasts, so every piece is practically priceless."

"What kind of Magic Stones are these?" Tilly asked. "They don't seem easy to carry."

"Stones of Light." Agatha pressed on the stone in the Prince's hand and channeled her magic power into it, causing a pale yellow light to stream out of it, which quickly exceeded the light of a torch. When the blinding light became too much to bear, she finally lifted her hand. "More than half of these are Stones of Light. Besides the ones produced by the Chaos Beasts, the rest were all battle spoils we gained from attacking Devil's Towns."

"How were the Magic Stones made into different sizes?" Anna asked curiously. "If they were all God's Stones of Retaliation, then they couldn't be cut with magic power, but the block of God's Stone of Retaliation was extremely hard and couldn't possibly be cut with knives either."

"An entire block?" Agatha was stunned. "Are you talking about the God's Stone of Retaliation vein?"

"It's right under Border Town's mines." Roland explained the story of the treasure map. "Its surface is very hard, and even a flintlock can only leave a tiny dent in it."

"I see." She couldn't help but smile. "You used this map to find my laboratory tower. Yes, it really was used by the Quest Society to mark the God's Stone of Retaliation vein and was a chosen location for the next Holy City."

"Holy City?" Everyone asked surprisedly in unison.

"Why else do you think there would be hundreds of cities on the

Fertile Plains, but only three Holy Cities?" She lifted the corners of her mouth. "These supposed Holy Cities are all built on top of God's Stone of Retaliation veins. We needed a lot of God's Stones of Retaliation to research the relationship between magic power and Magic Stones, and also to prevent large-scale damage in conflicts between witches.

"So you were planning to build a New Holy City on North Slope Mountain?" Roland asked in surprise.

"Yes, if we weren't defeated so quickly in the Battle of Divine Will." Agatha sighed. "It was the same case with the Barbarian Ridge in the Impassable Mountain Range—you now refer to it as the Hermes plateau, which is where the church's Holy City is now."

"The church also continued using the term 'Holy City'," Tilly said with a frown, "so it is even more possible that they are descendants of the Union."

Thank goodness they didn't build the church's Holy City in Western Region. Roland sighed quietly in relief.

"Anyway, the God's Stone of Retaliation is basically indestructible, so cutting it requires a special solution," Agatha continued to explain. "It contains the blood of witches with magic power... or the blood of demons."

"Blood?" Sylvie couldn't help but gape.

"Yes, and the amount of blood needed depends on the Stone," she said, spreading her hands. "In the Holy City, all adult witches were required to donate blood. Once it leaves the body, the blood lost magic power very quickly, so it must be used on the spot. Every two or three years, eligible witches would be ordered by the Union to go to the mines and donate blood, and any captured demons would also serve this purpose."

"Have you done this as well?" Anna asked.

"Of course," Agatha said, nodding. "Even the Three Chiefs of the Union were no exception."

"What about demonic beasts?" Sylvie asked. "Some demonic hybrids also seem to have magic power."

"Yes, but the levels of their magic power are very low, so their blood can only be used to deal with shattered stones, and they have no effect on the actual veins," Agatha replied. "After the God's Stone of Retaliation is cut, its hardness will greatly decrease with its size, and its range of impact will shrink as well. For example, the God's Stone of Retaliation that people carry around with them can be easily smashed with a hammer."

Chapter 388: The Sigil Of God's Will

These words confirmed Roland's guess, which was that the God's Stone of Retaliation did not affect magic power, but witches' abilities.

"Besides the Chaos Beast, did the Quest Society find any other ways to produce Magic Stones?"

Agatha shook her head. "It's easier said than done. The Union once had a witch who could turn God's Stones of Retaliation into regular stones, but all she did was to remove the magic power—it wasn't nearly enough to even produce the simplest Stones of Light." She turned to Sylvie. "You can see the form of magic power, so you should also be able to see the real forms of these crystals."

"It's a ball of faint... fog," Sylvie said with an unsure tone.

"This is one of the ways magic power gathers." Agatha nodded. "The Quest Society examined and recorded almost 10,000 witches and Magic Stones, and they found that most unevolved magic power came in the form of fog, cyclones, blown sand, light balls and flames. They might look similar, but each had an infinite amount of minute differences, which was why we believed there were no two identical magic powers. As for magic powers that were condensed after the High Awakening, their shapes differed even more."

"Its light is dimming," Tilly suddenly pointed to the Stone of Light in Roland's hand and said.

"That's because I only channeled a small amount of magic power," Agatha explained.

"But I once saw a Stone of Light in the Fjord ruins that never dimmed," she said confusedly. "If those underwater ruins belonged to you, then can you also make a Stone of Light shine for 400 years?"

"Underwater ruins?" Agatha was shocked. "Did some Union members go to the Swirling Sea?" She shook her head and dismissed this thought. "It's possible to make a Stone of Light shine forever, but it requires more than 10 witches."

"More than 10... " Anna mumbled. "Is it transferring magic power?"

"Yes. Some witches can refill others' magic power or directly exchange the magic power collected from two people. This way, a witch can channel much more power than the amount she has in her own body and cause a Magic Stone to act continuously." Agatha returned the Stone of Light to its original brightness. "However, this method doesn't work on every kind of Magic Stone. Usually, only the Stones of Mist with the simplest form of magic power can be used this way, such as Stones of Light or Echo Stones, which aren't much help in battle."

"But they would be very useful in the castle," Roland said excitedly, staring at the box of Stones of Light.

In a time before the Electrical Age, these things would be perfect lighting, and he was sick of weak and flickering candlelight. Candles were alright in the winter, but working in the office in the summer was absolute torture, not to mention it's horrible for his eyesight. Now, these magic stones could brighten the entire castle, even at night.

"They would?" Agatha asked disapprovingly. "I think they would be more useful in the laboratories, especially if we want to keep producing liquid oxygen at night, because open flames are too dangerous."

"Um... Is she asking to work overtime in addition to the eight hours during the day?" Roland tilted his head. "Ahem, let's take a look at the Magic Stones in the other boxes first."

A quick check showed that besides Stones of Light of various shapes and brightness, there were also some random Stones. According to the Ice Witch, although these were all priceless goods, they were still of the lowest tier of Magic Stones. For example, there were Stones of Vigilance that sent out signals and Stones of Pathfinding that located things. "I wasn't in charge of everything in the Holy City's stone tower, and I was basically estranged from the Quest Society at the time, so all the goods I transported were unimportant."

"What about these books?" Roland pointed to the black books in the other boxes. "Are these all lab records?"

"Some of these are the General Principles." Agatha blushed. "I wanted to save a copy as a promotion guide to the new witches

who had to reclaim wastelands."

Why was this embarrassing? Roland glanced at her curiously and continued to sift through the remaining boxes.

"This wooden box... is a little strange." Sylvie's words caused his hands to tremble and recoil immediately.

"Is there a booby trap?"

"No... there's an interlayer," she said, examining the box. "It's at the very bottom. I didn't notice it at first because I thought it was only a regular partition."

Roland took out all the books from the box, exposing the thick bottom. Anna carefully cut open the wooden plank and retrieved a cast iron box.

"What's it?" Roland curiously opened the lid and saw a thick metal plate encrusted with four colorful crystals. Its design revealed that it was obviously very unique. "Perhaps the Quest Society did leave you with some valuable objects after all."

Agatha gasped. "This... can't be possible!"

Her dramatic reaction confused the other four people, and Roland immediately put the metal plate back into the box. "What's wrong?"

"This is the Sigil of God's Will!" the Ice Witch said in disbelief. "How did Kagar manage to get his hands on this?" She rechecked the box a couple of times. "Did he steal it from the other witches in the Quest Society?"

"Maybe his fleet was attacked and someone entrusted him with it," Roland guess randomly. "It's been 400 years, and it doesn't matter who the box belonged to... What on earth is the Sigil of God's Will?"

"Some Magic Stones, when pieced together, can have extra abilities, alter their magic powers' properties, or increase their effects—this was the most important topic of research for the Quest Society." Agatha carefully scooped up the silver plate. "Magic Stones that are pieced together are called Sigils, and the Sigil of God's Will is the most powerful kind. Its Magic Stones all come from Senior Demons, and there are only three or four of its kind in all of Taquila."

Roland couldn't help but whistle in awe. "How powerful is it?"

"It can wipe out your entire castle."

The prince choked in shock.

"Don't worry, it also requires an alarming amount of magic power—the more Magic Stones are on the Sigil, the harder it is to activate." Agatha closed her eyes, and two of the Magic Stones on the metal plate began to glow, while the third remained dull. After

a while, she seemed to be exhausted and let go of the plate, panting. "The only witches who could use the Sigil of God's Will were the Union's two Chiefs."

"You mean... Transcendents?"

Agatha nodded.

Roland thought for a while and said, "Let Anna have a try."

"That's useless," Agatha said, shaking her head. "Extraordinaries use their magic power differently from ordinary witches, basically practicing all the time. Once they evolve, the amount of magic power in their bodies will greatly surpass... What?!"

Everyone saw that as soon as Anna touched the Sigil, the four Magic Stones immediately began lighting up one by one, and the edges of the metal plate began streaming with a gold light that looked like lightning. The gold light became more and more intense, and the Sigil shone like the rising sun!

"Let go of it right now!" Agatha screamed.

The light immediately vanished as if it had never even appeared. Anna let out a gasp and gently placed the Sigil back into the iron box. "It does use up a lot of magic power, so I can probably only use it twice."

The basement was dead silent.

Chapter 389: Entrust

"Sir... Eltek, dinner is ready."

Irene opened the room door and bowed rigidly. Her voice sounded more restrained than usual. This was the first time Ferlin had seen his wife behaving in such a manner. Even when she met the prince, she was not as nervous as this.

"Father?" He raised his voice and glanced at the knight who had not spoken a word since he returned.

"Ugh..." Sir Eltek blinked his eyes as if he had just woken up from a period of meditation. "Come and eat."

The dishes placed on the small dining table were especially sumptuous. To Ferlin, it was apparent that his wife had made a trip to the Convenience Market. He looked at her and smiled, as if to praise and encourage her. He started the dinner by slicing the bread as usual and then proceeded to divide the main course into four equal portions—apart from the three of them, there was also Irene's friend, May.

Earlier, when he came home, he saw May discussing the content of a drama with Irene. After he introduced his father to the two of them, he expected that May would choose to leave, as most people would do. However, she did not, and instead, after making a simple bow towards Sir Eltek while revealing a frown on her face, she remained beside Irene. Even more uncommonly, she proposed that she should stay for dinner.

Ferlin was boggled by all of this. In the past, when he wanted to thank her properly, he invited her several times to attend a banquet, but she never agreed even once.

However, Morning Light had no time to think about all of this. Although on the surface he appeared calm and collected, his heart was in an utter mess. The first reason was that he was worried about what his father thought about his wife, and the second Agatha's attitude. From the look of disappointment on his father's face, it was evident that, as the current head of the Eltek family, he cared a great deal about the matter. However, Ferlin did not know how to console his father, particularly because the many years of separation had created some estrangement between them. All he could do was continue to eat quietly.

Fortunately, Miss May was around.

Her conversation topic regarding the drama aroused the interest of Sir Eltek, and together they had a nice chat about the charm of King's City and the lives of the nobility. Hence, the dinner was not so dreary at last. Moreover, Irene was able to participate in the discussion regarding the new drama, and Sir Eltek even enquired about her recent performances. This allowed Ferlin to feel relieved.

After dinner, May swiftly took her leave.

After helping his wife to wash the cutlery, he was asked by his father to meet in the study.

"Your wife has made a good friend."

"You mean Miss May?" Ferlin was slightly surprised. "She's indeed an outstanding actress, and has assisted Irene tremendously in her dramas. She took care of Irene during the show in the Stronghold..."

"No, I'm not referring to acting," Sir Eltek said. "Didn't you notice? She kept asserting power over me."

"Assert power?" Ferlin's eyes grew bigger. "Weren't the two of them simply having a nice chat?"

"Hahaha..." The old man laughed uncontrollably and shook his head. "You really don't understand how nobles deal. Her story regarding King's City was taken from a legend about the interaction between a commoner girl and a noble man. It's called Cinderella. When discussing politics, she even referred to His Highness' intention to reclaim feudal land. I believe that she knows that you willingly severed ties with your family to be with Irene, or else, she wouldn't have opposed me in every sentence."

"Is... that right?"

Sir Eltek smiled. "Rather than be in awe of superficial things like status and title, you should know that it's one's practical actions which are more important. After talking to Miss May, I've figured out what to do regarding Miss Agatha. Whether or not our ancestors lied, we've returned the items that she entrusted to us

wholly intact. Even if she's unwilling to accept us, we can serve her through other means." As he spoke, he sighed loudly. "Although I personally disagree with your view, yet after seeing your life here with Irene, I suddenly realize that these efforts may not be futile after all."

"Thank you..." The sense of affirmation which was revealed in his father's words made Ferlin's eyes well up with tears. Although he was very firm about severing his family ties back then, he still hoped in his heart that his marriage would be endorsed by his family.

However, what Sir Eltek said next astounded him.

"Have you ever considered returning to the Eltek family?"

"What? No, I... you..." Morning Light was stupefied. He opened his mouth but did not know how to reply. "Return to the family? Why would father suddenly mention this?"

The old knight said slowly, "Since you know that your initial decision was a mistake, it's not too late to turn back."

After a long while, Ferlin said cagily, "I feel that my current work is decent, and also the life in Border Town is..."

"I'm not asking you to go back to become a knight in Longsong Stronghold." Sir Eltek interrupted. "You should understand what I mean." He then enunciated his words. "I want you to inherit the

family."

The Morning Light swallowed his saliva. "But brother..."

"Miso Eltek won't make a good successor," Sir Eltek said openly. "At first, he wanted to become a renowned knight in Western Region just like you, but after the Duke's defeat, he lost his direction. As a family of the losing side, we should pledge our allegiances to the new ruler of the city, but your brother continues to keep in close contact with the other four big families, and I'm unable to change his mind about it. You should be able to guess the reason for this."

"Because he's sure of becoming the next head of the family." Ferlin guessed. After he left the family, his father had no other option except Miso to succeed him. This was also probably why his brother gave him the cold shoulder when he returned to the family mansion after so many years.

"This has nothing to do with ability and knowledge. Ability can be developed and knowledge can be taught. But a suitable successor should know how to observe the current situation," his father continued saying. "Lord Petrov has announced His Highness Roland's new policies. By also inferring from Miss May's drama in the Stronghold, which is titled "New City", I suspect that he's going to shape the entire Western Region into one entity soon. It's uncertain whether the four big families will accept this change, but the situation is definitely not calm. At this time, the most suitable thing for us to do is to observe the changes quietly, rather than be used by these families as pathfinding stones."

Ferlin had heard this news before. His Highness had never concealed his own intentions and policies, and in fact, he would publicize them to his people before implementing them. This included the plan to build Border Town into a city.

However, he did not wish to participate in a contest over leadership of the family. Despite his father's words, Miso would definitely not take things lying down. Ferlin understood his younger brother's personality very well.

Finally, he shook his head. "Sorry, Father. I... "

"I'm not asking you to make a decision now." The knight gestured with his hands. "After all, I'm still very healthy, and with me around, our family won't lose its direction." His smile appeared to have aged somewhat. "If Miso could understand these, I wouldn't need to say so much. All I'm hoping for is that, should our family ever fall into some kind of trouble, you'll do us a favor—on behalf of your mother and me."

This time, Ferlin was not able to refuse.

Chapter 390: Winter

After Paper finished washing up, she wrung her towel and hung it on the snow-covered balcony.

By leaving the towel outside for a day, it would freeze completely. Before she used it again, all she needed to do was to knead and pat it a few times, and then remove the remnants of ice. Of course, she could also remain warm indoors and use her magic power to vaporize the moisture on the towel, but that would reduce her number of daily practices.

Paper was aware that her body's capacity for magic power was considered to be one of the worst among the witches, hence every drop of it had to be used wisely.

Just as she completed the cleaning work, someone knocked on the door. Almost every day at this time, big sister Wendy would bring her to the castle hall to enjoy a hearty breakfast.

"Coming!"

Paper opened the door cheerfully. It was indeed Wendy who was standing outside—she proceeded to hug Paper lovingly and sniffed her cheeks. "Excellent, you've cleaned up already."

"Hehe." Paper grinned and held Wendy's hand as they walked towards the castle hall together.

It had been nearly half a month since she came to Border Town, and she had become accustomed to the way of life.

Here, there was no need to leave her shack early in the morning to find food, and no need to worry that the firewood she gathered would be stolen. Aside from the time she spent filling her stomach and keeping warm, she could concentrate on practicing her magic power and acquiring knowledge. In the past, she could only imagine having such a life while chatting with her companions. A life where one had no worries about survival seemed to be reserved only for the masters and mistresses of the great noble families.

Paper had never expected that someday, she could also have this kind of life.

Wendy's palms felt soft and warm—a feeling Paper had never experienced while living in the slums. In her present life, Paper felt that there were people who constantly loved and cared about her. She hoped that she could remain permanently in this warm and loving place.

If it was only a dream, she would rather not wake up.

As they walked into the hall, Paper noticed that the witches were not sitting at the long table and eating their meals as usual. Instead, they crowded around a wall and bawled incessantly.

She blinked her eyes in curiosity, but was too embarrassed to ask Wendy what the witches were doing.

However, the latter seemed to read her thoughts, and said, laughing, "Our sisters are testing out their fighting capacities."

"Fighting capacity?" Paper was intrigued. "What... is that?"

"It's something that was invented by His Highness' eccentric rhetoric. Don't take it too seriously." Wendy bent her waist and lifted the young lady onto her shoulder. "See that silver sheet of metal? It's said to be a relic from the witches' kingdom, which existed more than four hundred years ago, and was used by Extraordinaries as a battle weapon. Only those with strong magic power can summon its might. His Highness has placed it in the hall so that everyone can test the level of their magic power, or should I say... to satisfy the curiosity of our sisters. Those who are able to illumine the four magic stones placed on the weapon in one breath would be considered to have divinely willed fighting capacity."

"..." Paper felt extremely confused. "Witches' kingdom?" "Extraordinaries?" "Magic Stones?" These foreign words left her scratching her head, but that did not mitigate the shock caused by the incredible sight before her—as the witches took turns to place their hands on the metal sheet, the embedded crystals glowed brightly and resembled a kaleidoscope of colorful stars.

"I can illumine two magic stones!" exclaimed Lightning, who was the same age as Paper. On her shoulder sat a stout-looking dove—Paper recalled that the bird was also a witch who was called Maggie around here.

"Two and a half, coo!" Pigeon cried out proudly.

"Aye, you actually did better than me? That's impossible!"

"Do you want to try?" Wendy laughed. "I guess that you won't do very well now. You haven't learnt how to imbue magic power into a magic stone, let alone summon a sigil. But, His Highness has stipulated this as a required course for witches, and therefore, you'll soon be given a Stone of Light to use for practice."

"Would it be as crystal-clear and shiny as these gems?" Paper was suddenly excited. She looked at Wendy and nodded. "I'll practice really really well!"

"Good girl." Wendy laughed and rubbed the young child's cheeks. "Eat first, then you'll have the energy to practice."

...

After finishing her oatmeal, Paper returned to the Witch Tower and began her daily practice.

Wendy had told her that everything on this Earth was formed of tiny balls which the eyes could not see, and material changes were the result of these balls separating and bonding. One's abilities could only accelerate these processes, rather than simply, for example, melting ice or cooling hot water.

Although she was not able to understand the meaning of Wendy's words, she conscientiously followed Wendy's request—she would

feel the magic power that was contained in her own body and released it as evenly as possible. From her earlier years living in the slums, she understood that the fact that she was now able to live a good life was because His Highness required the power of witches—this was her only worth, and therefore, if she did not want to be abandoned, she had to work hard.

Suddenly, Paper felt a twisting pain in her abdomen. Magic power was vibrating inside her body and seemed like it wanted to burst out, causing her to groan uncontrollably.

"What's the matter?" Wendy, who was by her side, asked.

"No, nothing." She shook her head. "Just now, my magic power felt like it wanted to break free."

"Break free..." Wendy pondered for a moment. "Do you remember when you became a witch?"

"It was probably winter," Paper said softly. "I cannot remember the exact date."

"It's now the end of autumn, and winter will be here in a few days." Wendy's smile disappeared. "As we near the Day of Awakening, our body's magic power will become active as a form of bite. Take a rest first. I'll call Nightingale over. She'll be able to see the changes of your body's magic power." She walked to the door, then turned back and added, "Don't worry. For a witch from Border Town, this is not a life and death issue."

...

Wendy's prediction was confirmed.

After three days, Paper was about to have her second Day of Awakening.

Lying on her large bed, she looked around at the circle of witches that had come to visit her. Listening to their gabble of comforting words, she suddenly felt like crying.

The pain of being burned by magic power, which she remembered from her first awakening, seemed to become much more bearable.

"Because your practice time is relatively short, it's not guaranteed that the pain of the bite will completely go away." Wendy sat at Paper's bedside and stroked her hair. "But remember, don't ever think about giving up, and don't lose your sense of awareness."

Paper nodded.

She did not dare to speak up, afraid that the moment she opened her mouth, she would start to cry loudly.

She did not want to disgrace herself in front of everyone.

While living in the slums, crying was seen as the weakest

expression, something which only people who gave up would do.

Paper closed her eyes and quietly waited for that moment to arrive.

...

When she opened her eyes, she saw that outside the window was a sea of white.

The bite was weaker than she had expected, such that the various means of rescue which everyone had helped to prepare turned out to be redundant. When she awakened, she felt that her body's capacity for magic power had increased considerably. Small changes had taken place all over her body. Her eyes could see further, and her limbs possessed greater strength than before.

After she washed her face, she once again heard Wendy knocking on the door.

"I'm coming." Paper opened the door cheerfully and held Wendy's hand. However, this time, Wendy did not bring her to the castle hall, but instead, to the Lord's office on the third floor.

The gray-haired big shot smiled gently at Paper and held a piece of parchment in front of her.

"From today onwards, you're officially a member of the Witch Union."

Chapter 391: The Sigil's Secret

After winter arrived, the snow seemed to subside considerably.

Roland was humming a tune as he read through the three manuscripts on his table.

They were, separately, the plan for the trial and production of the latest type of ammunition, the blueprint for the latest generation of small weapons, and the construction plan for the Spellcaster Tower.

The former two manuscripts were ideas which he had conceived for a long time. Now that he could make use of Agatha's abilities to freeze and control temperature, the town's nitric acid output increased manyfold. The problem regarding the stability of the mass production of nitroglycerin had also been solved, and therefore, all of the conditions for the manufacture of double base propellants were fundamentally provided.

Even though Roland knew that this type of propellant was created by dissolving nitrocotton in nitroglycerin, and eventually obtaining a viscous jelly that could be sliced or granulated, he still required an alchemist to test and find out the mixture ratios involved.

Fortunately, Kyle Sichi was already very experienced in conducting both quantitative and qualitative experiments. If this task was given to him, the results should be obtainable in one or two weeks.

Since Roland was already trying to produce a brand new propellant, naturally, the development of a new type of light weapon was also on the agenda.

Compared with blackfire gunpowder, which required the use of a large-caliber revolving rifle, only a small amount of a double base propellant was necessary to achieve an equivalent lethality. Therefore, based on firepower and cost-to-performance ratio, it was definitely better to switch from rifles to light-caliber automatic weapons.

Of course, the specific parameters were to be further determined according to the results of Anna's processing.

Roland drank a mouthful of hot tea and placed the third manuscript in front of him. This was what excited him the most at present.

Compared to the other plans, the contents of this document looked very discordant. At Agatha's request, he planned to build a Spellcaster Tower beside the Witch House and use it for the research and manufacturing of sigils.

He imagined a lofty Magic Tower standing high among the masses of chimneys and factories. It felt simply... too cool and fancy.

Roland started laughing uncontrollably.

Nightingale, who was at one side busy gnawing on dried fish, looked at Roland contemptuously. "Are sigils really so interesting? The witches' kingdom possessed many sigils, yet still lost to the demons."

"But there're some very interesting things inside." The prince took a thick book out of a drawer. It was a sigil collection that was translated from the experimental notes left behind by the Quest Society. It recorded all of the formulas discovered by the Quest Society over more than 200 years.

To him, this was a completely new territory.

After Agatha had completed the translation, Roland spent most of his nighttimes reading the book. As he read about the uses and composite lists of the magic stones, He felt as if he was assembling runewords. Probably, when the Chief Alchemist first received the book of Elementary Chemistry, he carried similar excitement as he studied the different chemical formulas.

"Knowledge that's new always seems especially attractive, even if it's only basics."

"For example?" Nightingale leant over to Roland.

"Like this." Roland pointed to a sentence in the book. "The ancient witches called this the Sigil of Listening. It is used for long-distance communication, and, like the Sigil of Tracking, it'll remain effective even if it's separated into parts." He shifted his

pointing finger downwards. "The materials are very simple. All you need is a piece of Echo Stone and a piece of Marking Stone."

According to the book's description, the effective range of this sigil was dozens of miles. Although it could not compare to the mobile phones of later ages, which were supported by many signal towers and satellites, it could still suffice as a walkie-talkie.

"Is it?" Nightingale glanced at the page and then pulled Roland's finger towards the page on the right. "However, it's written here that 'Echo Stones come from Fearsome Demons, and Marking Stones are commonly seen in Devil's Town.' How are you going to obtain these two magic stones?"

"No, we already have the materials," Roland said zealously. "The piece of red crystal which Lightning found in the ruins was an Echo Stone. As for the Marking Stone, it's one of the composite materials of the Sigil of Tracking—Tilly has brought along a few of this, and they simply have to be disassembled."

"Even if Agatha is able to create it, you'll only be able to obtain one Sigil of Listening."

"Just let her try. Anyway, when we fight demons in the future, we'll acquire more and more Magic Stones." It was too bad that, previously, there weren't the conditions for research on new applications of magic power. Now that Roland had the technical support of Agatha, he was not about to let go of these resources which cost nearly nothing.

"Alright." Nightingale shrugged. "As for the Sigil of God's Will, what magic stones does it require?"

"This... I remember seeing it on the last page." Roland flipped to the final page of the book. "By the way, how was the result of your fighting capacity test?"

Nightingale flinched for a while and then uttered a single word. "Secret!"

She seemed to have been frustrated by Anna.

"Found it, over here." Roland pouted his lips. "The four required magic stones are all written as unknown... probably, out of confidentiality considerations, the Quest Society didn't record them in the written form. However, according to Agatha, these magic stones mostly come from the Senior Demons, and therefore, even if they were written down, no one would be able to obtain them."

"And yet you display such a precious object openly in the hall." Nightingale groaned. "If the Transcendents find out, they'll be so angry at you that they'll even come back to life."

"Because it's nothing precious, probably... as precious as a few dozen kilograms of TNT." Roland laughed but did not reply.

...

This time, he waited until Agatha had completed her production of acid for the day before he called her into the office.

"Have a look at the Spellcaster Tower that I've designed for you." Roland held up his sketch. "The basement is a warehouse, and there are three storeys above ground. They are, separately, the apprentice lab, the tower master's lab, and the office."

"Wait... why is it called the Spellcaster Tower?" Agatha frowned. "All I want is a chemical lab like Sir Kyle's, except a little more spacious and bright. It'll be very troublesome to build a tower like this. In Taquila, towers were built only because the land area of the city was small. You have lots of open space here."

"That's not fashionable already!" Roland shouted in his heart. "Anyway, the problems regarding the construction aren't difficult to solve. Aside from the facilities that I have stated, do you have other demands?"

"No." Agatha raised her hands. "If you insist."

"Great." Roland placed the sketch down and started talking about the idea he thought of in the morning. "Can you complete the sigil production alone?"

"No, I can't." Agatha shook her head. "Although sigils are created by linking magic stones, the materials required to transmit magic power are very complicated. Most importantly, it requires the blood of demons."

The prince was stunned. "What?"

"You didn't hear wrongly. And it has to be fresh blood." She said solemnly. "When the Quest Society was figuring out the nature of magic power, it conducted thousands of experiments and eventually proved that the flesh and blood of witches, demons and demonic beasts are completely different in nature, and their functions are also remarkably different."

"The flesh and blood of...witches?" Roland received a shock when he suddenly realized the meaning behind these words. He asked impulsively, "What are their functions?"

"To create God's Punishment Army," Agatha said stoically.

Chapter 392: Determination

Roland widened his eyes and said, "Using dead..."

"No." Agatha interrupted him. "Just as with demons' blood, the flesh should be taken from a living witch."

He heard Nightingale gasp behind him.

"This was the most important secret of the Quest Society. Not long after the experiment began, I left the stone tower of the Holy City. The only thing I knew about the experiment was that it used the blood of weak and old witches, mixed it with God's Stone of Retaliation, and injected it into the bodies of mortals to make mortal's body change." Agatha's tone was a bit grave. "Judging from the notebook you found, this research must have succeeded."

"How much blood was needed?"

"More than half." Agatha's answer saddened Roland. "The blood must come from the same person, otherwise the magic powers contained in it would reject each other and their effectiveness would greatly decrease." She paused. "You guessed correctly. A witch died for every experiment, and mortals could barely survive the erosion of the weakened magic blood. In the beginning, no one could survive. A great number of society members objected to it because they believed that mortals could never gain magic power. If not for the insistence of Chief Alice, this plan might not have been carried out fully."

"But now the church has a huge God's Punishment Army... According to Tilly's information, there may be 500 to 1,000 God's Punishment Warriors," Roland said, frowning.

"Suppose the success recorded in the notebook refers to the increase of the transformation rate to 10%, it means that at least half of the witches had been killed. I don't think those people could gather such a large number of old witches."

"The church arrested and raised witches so that they could drain their blood and create powerful extraordinary warriors?" Roland felt the hand on his shoulder clench involuntarily. "Damn it. Hundreds of witches with all kinds of magic powers died in the Holy City of Hermes for no reason, and they were branded as the Fallen and were loathed by the public. Such an ignorant organization must be destroyed, even if its original intention was to fight against the demons."

"Rest assured. I'll stop them," Roland said word by word.

After Agatha left, Nightingale shut off her Mist and appeared in front of him. She gritted her teeth and said, "I didn't expect that was how God's Punishment Army was produced! If the Church really came from the Union, their chief must be a lunatic! "

"Indeed." He sighed. "Now it makes sense why the church has been adopting female orphans and abandoned babies everywhere—they were only collecting materials for creating a huge army. Perhaps slandering the witches as Devil's minions was also part of their plan, in order to justify their treatment of witches."

"..." Nightingale did not respond, but her face was full of anger.

Roland slightly worried about her. Holding her hand, he said, "You don't intend to..."

"Pick a fight with the church by myself?" She shook her head. "I'm not that silly. If they were so fragile that they could be overturned by a witch, someone else would have done it long ago."

The prince felt a little relieved. "The ultimate goal of creating the God's Punishment Army is to strengthen the church. If there're extraordinary ones among the witches the church raised, they won't have to give blood... Even escaping into the Mist won't guarantee safety when facing witches loyal to the church. When we wage a war against the church, the safest strategy is to push forward step by step following the firearms of the First Army. Whatever the enemies are, they are no different in front of bullets." He paused. "I've said that in the new world, witches will be able to live a normal life without restrictions, just like ordinary people do."

"Hmm." Nightingale whispered, putting her forehead on Roland's head. "I'm sure you can do it all."

Wendy sent Paper back to the witches' building and happily returned to the Lord's castle.

Recently, she felt her days were very fulfilling. Although her previous life was quite comfortable, she'd always felt something missing. Now, with this little girl who was well-behaved and full of admiration for her, she believed there was nothing more pleasing than this.

"Winter has come. This is when the witches' awakenings happen the most. In the following months, there might be more new witches joining the Witch Union, so there'll be more kids for me to take care of." This thought excited Wendy very much.

She gently hummed the song she heard from His Highness. But when she pushed open her bedroom door, what she saw startled her.

God, what do I see? Nightingale sits in front of the book table, reading the Natural Science Theoretical Foundation!

Did she fight with His Highness Roland?"

"Ahem." Wendy coughed twice. "I'm back."

Nightingale nodded, giving no response. From the side, her face seemed very upset and sad.

She must have guessed correctly.

Wendy stepped forward, patted Nightingale's shoulder, and softly comforted her. "This is love. You sometimes quarrel, but when you think about it, it's nothing serious. Sleep on it and you'll feel better afterwards."

"What are you talking about?" Nightingale frowned.

"You and His Highness... Fighting is only temporary, so don't take it seriously."

"Why would I quarrel with him?" She said, touching her forehead.

"Uh... you didn't?" Wendy paused. "Then why are you reading all of a sudden?"

Nightingale sighed and told Wendy about the Experiment of God's Punishment that Agatha had revealed to her. "I just feel I need to become stronger to help more in future battles to overthrow the church."

"I see." Upon hearing what Nightingale said, Wendy solemnly nodded. "I didn't expect that the church built monasteries to obtain witches' blood... If it weren't for Ashes, who had suddenly awakened as an Extraordinary and drew all the guards' attention, I'm afraid I would have been among the other corpses in the church."

"Nightingale is right. Perhaps the environment in the castle is so

relaxing that I've let my guard down." Wendy suddenly realized that the enemies were very close. Be it from the church or demons, their threats weren't completely eliminated, yet she hadn't improved for a long time. Although her magic power was slowly increasing, her fighting skills and ability to create wind weren't so different from the time when she was in the Witch Cooperation Association, and evolution was totally out of the question.

Sisters such as Mystery Moon, Hummingbird and Echo were studying very hard. Compared to them, she seemed to be slacking off. As an older predecessor, she couldn't even light two Magic Stones on the Sigil of God's Will. If this continued, she would feel like an unworthy elder to the other witches.

"You're right. I need to study hard as well." Wendy took a deep breath. She decided that from that day on, she would spend two hours every night before bed learning the knowledge from His Highness.

She went to the bathroom to have a quick wash, returned to the room, and found Nightingale lying on the desk, asleep.

Chapter 393: New Boats Entering The Water

A crowd of people surrounded the temporary shipyard by the Redwater River.

Everyone knew that in the wooden shed some strange boats were being built with shells resembling a huge bathtub. The boats were made of gray cement—a material which was no different from rock after it set. If they were put into water, there would be no trace of it except a splash.

The craftsmen who worked here gave it a proper name: Bathtub Ship.

Today would be when the first two boats went into the water.

The crowd was composed of two kinds of people. One kind was civilians who had just joined Border Town and were curious about the event or felt it unconceivable, so they came to check it out with great skepticism. A great number of them were fishermen and sailors from the Eastern and Southern Territory. The other kind was locals who were used to His Highness' various "miracles". They had heard of the previous Littletown and gathered here in the drifting snow to see His Highness.

Cacusim was among the first kind.

When Cacusim first saw the notice about the test of new boats and the new recruiting order of His Highness, he said he would come and watch the boats entering water no matter what. Vader

had no choice but to ask His Excellency Carter for a leave and accompany Cacusim. Considering Cacusim wasn't familiar with this area, and the ground was covered with thick snow, Vader was worried about his going to a crowded place all by himself. If he fell down in a push-squeeze situation, it could mean incurable injury.

"You're underestimating me, child." The old man waved his hand, suggesting Vader not to follow him. "I've been through winds and waves. Although I'm getting old, my physical condition isn't much worse than yours."

"Sure, sure," Vader said carelessly. "I've already asked for leave, so any rejection is too late. I just don't quite get it—why do you have to come and see this thing enter water? It's only a boat."

"But you said it was made out of gray stone." Cacusim shook his head. "Have we entered a time when even a bathtub-sized stone could float on water?"

"It's my own fault." Vader thought. "I shouldn't have mentioned the notice at the square." "Maybe His Highness was only bragging. Probably it's a wooden boat with a few parts made out of that... cement."

"That's even more unlikely." The old man insisted. "Think about it—when was this wooden shed built?"

"About... over a month ago."

"That's right. It's before when you were recruited as a policeman. When we first moved to the Inner City here, this place was still empty!" His beard shook. "It took a month to build the shed, so it means building the first boat only took half a month."

"Uh, isn't that normal?" Vader was bewildered.

"Of course not!" Cacusim exclaimed, "In the name of the Sea God! I've never seen a boat that could be built within half a month. It's not a matter of size—for any type of sailing boat, processing keels alone would take more than a month, because you must wait until the wood is totally dried to then curve it with steam. This is a very complicated process that can't be completed in a short time."

Vader was very surprised. "Why are you so familiar with shipbuilding?"

"I was once a captain, child." The old man sighed. "When I was young, I used to sail with lots of goods through Seawindshire and the Port of Clearwater, and I reached as far as the Kingdom of Dawn and Fjord Islands. Then something happened... and now I'm here. "

"You've never told me any of that." Vader said with his eyes wide open.

"You've never asked, child." Cacusim shrugged.

"Alright." Vader shifted his attention to the shipyard. "So what

you're really curious about is the technique His Highness used to build a sailing boat within half a month."

"Any captain would be curious." Cacusim touched his beard. "If His Highness isn't lying, do you know what this means?" One or two years later, his fleet will be sailing through all the rivers in the Kingdom of Graycastle."

Vader' heart twitched. "You don't intend to..."

Cacusim smiled, "I can't always eat your oatmeal."

"His Highness never lies." Someone nearby suddenly said. "Besides, that's not a sailing boat."

Vader turned around to find that the speaker was a young man. Judging from his accent, he seemed to be a local Western Region resident. "Not a sailing boat?"

"No. It can travel without wind and at a speed faster than any sailing boat." "The young man continued proudly, "Have you seen the steam engines in the mines? They can easily drag a basket of ore out of the mine hole. These cement boats are driven by those steam engines, and according to His Highness, they're actually steam-powered boats!"

"Travelling without sails?" Cacusim said with disbelief, "Kid, that's nonsense. If a boat has no sails, it can only rely on paddling. Such a boat can never travel faster than a sailing boat. Besides,

they're not in the water yet. If you haven't seen it, how can you be sure that they can move in water at all?"

"Of course I've seen it," said the young man. "You must be newcomers from other territories, so it's normal if you don't understand. In the summertime, I modified a steam-powered boat for a Caravan across the strait. But the boat was still wooden and not as durable as those cement ones."

Vader intended to argue more, but that young man's eyes suddenly brightened up. Pointing to the shipyard, that man said, "Look over there. His Highness is here!"

Cheers and applause erupted from the crowd as all the people raised their hands to greet the Lord.

Prince Roland went up to the temporary wooden platform next to the shipyard, conveyed a few congratulatory words, and then announced the entering water of the new boats.

With rhythmic chants, the workers opened the wooden shed towards the Redwater River. A boat with a 40-meter-long gray hull slid down the river levee, collecting snow, and plunged into the icy water.

Vader felt his heart jump into his throat. He thought this thing would sink directly to the river bottom, but to his surprise, after the rear half entered the water, the front lifted up and splashed with foam.

The crowd burst into applause again.

"Gee, it really floats up." Cacusim froze in shock. "But is it really made of stone?"

Vader had the same question—the surface of the Bathtub Ship looked so smooth, as if it was made of finely polished granite slabs seamlessly connected together. The hull of the boat looked like one whole piece. The boat cabin was shallow and it had no decks, so there were no places for the crew to sleep. Furthermore, the boat bottom was too flat for masts to be fixed on. As its nickname indicated, this thing looked exactly like a bathtub.

Either way, His Highness had indeed managed to produce the boat within half a month.

Vader looked at Cacusim and found his eyes glinting with excitement.

"I want to apply to be captain," said the old man.

Chapter 394: The Seed Of A Navy

Roland watched the second cement boat slip into the water with satisfaction as his subjects cheered loudly.

The two cement boats looked simple in terms of structure, but they were actually much better than previous models, namely the Little Town. A framework of dense steel reinforcement had been added to the internal structure, and the quality of the cement had improved tremendously. The overall strength of the boat was thus several times greater than the Little Town.

To expedite the shipbuilding process, Roland reserved slots and ports for steam engines, transmission mechanisms and paddle wheels when he designed the hull. This way, laborers only needed to weld bolts into the metal components. They could quickly build the boat putting pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Meanwhile, the mold was now made of iron rather than temporary masonry. This change not only guaranteed a high density of the poured concrete, thereby improving the boat's waterproof performance, but it also ensured that each boat was almost exactly the same. This helped to avoid errors when installing the power system. In order to create a complete design of the mold, Roland had scrapped at least seven or eight testing samples. Fortunately, cement was no longer scarce these days. Steam engines had replaced human labor, from stone grinding all the way to kiln feeding. It was the only large-scale industrial project that did not rely on witches' abilities in Border Town.

With ample materials, reliable molds and skilled laborers, the

only factor that limited the production of hulls was the hardening rate of cement. However, with the help of Paper's reaction acceleration ability, it only took one day (rather than the original one to two months) to launch a cement boat. In other words, the shipyard could launch an unpowered vessel every two or three days if Roland wished to.

If the speed of steam engine manufacturing could catch up with that of crew training, he would most likely develop a huge shipping fleet in a short period of time and fill the Redwater River with his own cement boats. They would look like "dumplings in boiling water".

That was the appeal of industrialization.

Now that the hull had been completed, the next step would be the installation of power units. The mechanical equipment was pretty much the same as those on the modified boats of the Chamber of Commerce at Crescent Moon Bay. The craftsmen already had practical experience, so he didn't need to worry about it.

"I don't understand. Why did you tell these things to subjects?" Nightingale asked.

"To advertise the national power." Roland smiled faintly.

"I'm sorry?"

"I mean to behold the tremendous changes the town has gone through." The prince stroked his chin. "You probably never expected a boat made of stones could float on the water before seeing the Little Town. My subjects think the same way. After realizing what is impossible, they'll have a greater sense of township. It's a comprehensive upgrading in mentality, which can even turn into a belief that there's nothing they can't achieve."

"I don't quite understand." Nightingale sounded a little confused.

"You just see it as a means of propaganda, and that will do," Roland smiled and said. In this era, the nobilities only celebrated with civilians for big events or ceremonies, both of which were almost entirely noble affairs. If it weren't for the free food, many civilians wouldn't attend. Nevertheless, the cement boats were the combined work of hundreds of laborers, and they were part of the festivities.

After witnessing constant miracles, members of the territory would gradually develop their confidence and sense of identity, collectively referred to as "superpower mentality" in later generations. Once a territory had become powerful and prosperous, the mentality of its subjects would inevitably experience positive changes.

...

A week later, Roland met over twenty townies who had applied for the captain's position in the castle's hall.

He was quite surprised at first when Barov reported the number, as he did not expect there would be so many "top-notch talents" among the refugees taken in by this town. When he read the detailed report that he couldn't help laughing. There were quite a few fishermen who operated rafts and small fishing boats, even some boatmen who made a living providing ferry services. They could indeed be regarded as "captain", in a sense.

Among all the applicants, there were only three people with experience operating sloops on the inland river, one of whom claimed that he used to work as a commander for a merchant fleet, and had earned a living on the sea for a long time.

Roland thought for a while, then decided to recruit all twenty people.

Steam-powered boats belonged to a completely different system from that of sailboats, and were also operated in a distinct way. Even an experienced captain would not necessarily learn the operation of paddle steamers that fast. Besides, he knew nothing about operating a boat himself, so it would be better for them to learn as they went.

Since he was starting from scratch, he needed to be resolute and have the courage to explore.

"I've reviewed your applications," Roland glanced at the group of people kneeling in the hall, "Today I've summoned you here to tell you that you've passed the preliminary assessment, and have gloriously become the first group of captain interns. Please rise."

"Yes... Your Highness," all the people rose gingerly, exchanging looks with one other. They looked rather confused about the term "captain intern".

The prince took the initiative to explain, "Being an intern means you haven't been officially hired yet. You'll only get half of the salary stated in the post until you are officially on board, ten silver royals a month. The first two months will be the learning period, during which you will get yourselves familiarized with the performance, operation method and procedures of the new boat. The third month will be the trial period, during which you'll be assessed in terms of your learning ability. Only the qualified ones will be promoted to official captains and paid full salary. Those who aren't willing to accept these terms can leave now."

Nobody in the group moved. After a while, an old man suddenly spoke, "Your Highness, who'll teach us and who'll assess us to see if we're qualified?"

Roland cast him a glance with great interest. He was the one who claimed to be an experienced fleet commander. His name appeared to be Cacusim. If Roland remembered correctly, he was a relative of the policeman from the assassination case two months ago. Judging from the old man's tone, Roland could tell that he didn't think there was anyone qualified to teach him how to operate a ship. Indeed, there was none.

"The 'teachers' will be yourselves," the prince nodded and said.

These words caused a stir among the group.

"Your Highness, what does that mean?" Cacusim asked, confused.

"How much do you know about steam engines?" Roland replied with a question. As he expected, not a single person could answer. "The steam-powered boat is brand new in every aspect. Your past experience will not actually help much, therefore you need to explore and find a way yourselves. Of course, I'll send the craftsmen from the steam engine plant to assist you in familiarizing yourselves with machines." He paused for a little bit and said, "The assessment approach is very simple. Those who are able to operate the boat with a group of sailors and complete a transportation task will be regarded as qualified."

Although the saying 'It takes ten years to build an army and a hundred years a navy' was exaggerating slightly, it did indicate the difficulty in building a navy. If this group of people could master the operation of the steam-powered boat, they could for sure foster a large group of capable crews for the Western Region. These crews could be directly employed to build steam-powered shallow water gunboats later.

He wondered what kind of navy it would turn out to be.

Chapter 395: Deep Down Inside The Winter Forest

Leaf passed through the branches and foliage looking for Lightning and Maggie.

In actuality, she was not exactly passing through them, but moving just her vision—her body was integrated into the thick forest.

It was an amazing feeling. She felt like a bird, except a bird would fall to the ground if it wasn't flapping its wings, whereas she wouldn't. As long as she maintained this form, she could cross from one end of the Fusion Forest to the other instantly. Of course, compared to the entire Misty Forest, the range that Leaf could cover now was just a drop in the ocean.

Ever since her ability had evolved, she had longed to experience the Misty Forest to the west of the town. If she could control this vast forest it would be of great help to His Highness, whether it was fighting against demonic beasts or collecting goods and materials. There wasn't much she could do for His Highness in return. Apart from improving crops, this was the only thing she could do, so she wanted to be good at it.

Compared to the castle's back garden, this was a real forest. Its complexity was far greater than the ecosphere of the castle's olive trees and grape vines and beyond comparison. There were numerous creatures hiding beneath every inch of earth. Looking down along the roots of plants she could sense dormant animals, squirming insects, and decaying remains, along with tiny babbling

streams.

To prevent losing herself, Leaf expanded her territory with great caution—starting from the city wall on the west, extending little by little each day. Once she completely adapted to an environment, she would then try to control a new plot of forest land.

At this rate, she could cover the entire Misty Forest within two or three years.

Shortly after, Leaf found two people hunting in the forest. If she had been walking in the snow instead of flying above the treetops, she would have noticed them sooner.

"I found some prey," said Leaf, shaking the branches.

"Ah!" Lightning patted her chest after a shudder. "You scared me!"

"Coo, coo!" Maggie nodded repeatedly.

"Sorry." Leaf revealed herself through a tree trunk, just like a twig growing out of the branches. "Is this better?"

"Well, at least I'm not talking to a ghost." Lightning landed quietly. "You can appear anywhere in the forest at will?"

She nodded. "As long as it falls in the territory that's under my

control."

Maggie landed right on Leaf's back, walked a few steps back and forth, and even pecked where her body and the trunk joined. "You've even grown into a tree, coo!"

Feeling her back tickling, Leaf couldn't help laughing. "Because this is my ability," said she.

"It feels a little weird, coo."

"How can you call someone else weird? You've turned yourself into a giant demon bird." Lightning rolled her eyes and looked at Leaf. "Where's the prey?"

"Follow me," she said, turning her head.

Leaf couldn't sustain a human form while moving, instead she made vines grow up from the ground to lead Lightning and Maggie on the way.

"What kind of prey?" Lightning asked.

"A big boar that ran out of the depths of the forest," she replied. "Do you really want to catch it yourself? I can just tie it up with grape vines and throw it at the foot of the city wall."

"Of course. Explorers seek more than just results." The little girl

raised her head. "The process is sometimes more memorable than the outcome."

"I'm good as long as there's meat to eat, coo!"

Leaf could not help smiling. The two of them had already become frequent visitors to the Misty Forest before she had integrated into it. They hunted in the forest to practice their magic powers, and Maggie would carry all of the prey they caught back to the castle. Half of the meat on the table these days was provided by them.

"Look, there it is," said Leaf.

There was a huge boar squatting down by the stream, lapping up the cold water. With large, sharp tusks at the side of its snout, and a raised mane that was almost finger-length, it appeared to be a tough enemy. Hunters would normally stay away when coming across such an animal, but it was just a feast in the witches' eyes.

"I'm ready," said Lightning, who pulled out her dagger.

"No gun?" Leaf asked in surprise.

"That would be too boring." She wiped her nose with great confidence and rushed straight toward the target.

"Good luck, coo!"

The little girl's figure, like a streak of golden light, sprang onto the head of the boar from behind. As she rose, the boar shook its head fiercely, bursting out a high-pitched scream.

"She missed it?" No... Leaf noticed one of the boar's eyes had become a bloody gash. It seemed that Lightning was planning to take advantage of her flexibility and first eliminate the threat of counterattacks from the enemy, and then exhaust it through a battle of attrition.

The boar was as clumsy as a stone facing Lightning's attack from the sky. It soon fell to the snow without the strength to resist.

She whistled, "How was that?"

"Good job," Leaf said. She tied the boar's rear legs with vines and hung it up. "First let's bleed it out. His Highness says meat without any traces of blood is tastier."

"Purr." Maggie's mouth was watery. "It's gonna be a big meal tonight, coo."

"Wait... " Leaf suddenly sensed there were other creatures entering the forest. She looked toward the edge of the controlled area and saw two grey wolves approaching.

She frowned, something was wrong. This type of animal usually lived deep within the forest and wouldn't normally come so close to Border Town, even in the winter.

She was just debating whether she should tell Lightning when a familiar figure suddenly appeared before her eyes. Leaf felt all her hair stand up as she remembered the tragic battle she had experienced in the Barbarian Land.

"Demons!"

She saw two demons slowly walking in the direction of the city wall. There were no Magic Stones on their arms, nor spears on their back, so they weren't carrying any weapons. However, Leaf noticed that they both wore a black iron glove, the same weapon that had killed Red Light.

"Why would demons come here?"

With great horror and uneasiness, she turned to Lightning and said, "Get out of here, quick! Demons are coming!"

"What?" Both of them were slightly startled.

Leaf briefly told them what she saw and urged them on, "Hurry up. They don't have a mount and can't catch up. I'll come later."

To her surprise, Lightning hesitated for a moment and then shook her head, saying, "I'm staying here to fight them."

"F... Fight?" Leaf was stunned and asked, "Why?"

"If I run away from the enemy now, how can I defeat them in the future?" The little girl took a deep breath, pulled the gun from her waist and said, "My father told me to get up from where you fall. I won't run away any more."

Chapter 396: The Fierce Battle

"The explorers will never be afraid of the adventures, but they will definitely not take an adventure recklessly.

Demons are not that horrible because they can also be killed. And they have a huge weakness—they can't survive without Red Mist.

Leaf once used the crossbow bolts to kill a trapped demon. Nightingale managed to kill the enemy under a very unfavorable circumstance." Lightning secretly cheered for herself and she believed that she could also make it.

"We should first report this to His Highness," Leaf said hurriedly. "Comparing with us, both Nightingale and Ashes are much more experienced in fighting the demons!"

"But, the demons may have already left by the time they reach here." Lightning checked the pistol's cartridge to ensure that it was filled with bullets and said, "By letting such dangerous enemies wandering around the border, we'll face much more serious risks."

"I... can stay and keep an eye on them."

"What if they walk out of your control area," the little girl insisted and continued, "and if you try to stop them, you'll end up exposing yourself. Three of us might as well work together."

Leaf relapsed into silent. She seemed to be persuaded.

"Coo coo!" Maggie stood on top of Lightning and fluttered her wings.

"Alright," she scratched the pigeon's neck and said, "we'll each take care of a demon."

"What did she just say?" Leaf asked.

Lightning pouted and said, "She said she wants to break the head of the enemy with her claws and pound the flesh into a meat pie with her wings. Finally, she will toast it in the fire to find out how it may taste like."

"She just said 'Coo' twice!" the latter questioned.

"It's basically what it means." The little girl nodded earnestly.

"An excellent explorer is not only extraordinarily brave but also has the ability to lead the entire team, helping them to relax when they are nervous and keeping them when they are over relaxed. I'll try my best to follow your words, father."

Lightning shook her wrist and the cartridge was closed. Trying not to look nervous, she pretended to look calm and said, "How far are they away from here?"

"About three hundred meters away from our right." Leaf

answered.

"I should have seen the enemies if I was not blocked by the woods." She was thinking that she definitely had the advantage of taking the first shot, and the pistol obviously outperforms the Magic Stone due to its long range. "You can trap the demons with vines, right? Just like last time at the Barbarian Land."

"I believe I should be able to trap them for a short period of time."

"OK. We can attack from the sky." Lightning said, "It's the last direction the enemies will notice. They will temporarily focus on the vines only. We can end this fight in seconds."

"I... understand." The leaves shook slightly. Perhaps because there were too many related horrible memories when Leaf was in the Witch Cooperation Association. But Lightning had no time to worry about this at this moment. She would probably lose her courage if they kept waiting. After all, she and Maggie were the ones that fight the demons. But Leaf would hide in the woods. She wouldn't be hurt no matter how the demons attacked the vines.

"Let's get started!" Lightning flew right into the sky.

"Coo!" Pigeon was following right behind her.

The forest instantly looked like green and white patches below her. The little girl put on the goggles given by His Highness and she felt braver right away.

"They're over there." Maggie transformed into a Gray-tailed hawk and found the targets just after seconds of searching—with her hawk eye, she would never even miss a running rabbit in the snow.

Lightning took a deep breath. Thunder and His Highness flashed upon her mind. She shook her head and made her mind clear. With her hands holding the pistol grip, she said, "I'll take care of the left side and you, the right side. When we are half way through then you turn into the giant-winged bird again."

"Leave it to me. Coo!"

"Go!" The little girl shouted and then began to dive in. With the cold wind roaring through her cheeks, her ears were hurting. She moved her head a little bit into the scarf. Thinking of the shooting method she learned from Nightingale, she pointed the flintlock forward. The effective range of the bullet was about 100 meters, but it was clear that she should move as close as possible to make sure the target would be hit. Assuming that Leaf's information was right, the demons' iron gloves must be inlaid with the electrical Magic Stone. Their magic range was around five meters, almost the same as the witches'. It was the best choice to shoot them at a distance of seven to eight meters.

The enemies' figures became clearer. And she could see their horrible headgears and scarlet masks. Suddenly, a demon stopped to look up and roared towards them. "Are we... exposed?" Lightning's heart sank. "Why does the enemy act as if they can perceive her?" At the same time, countless vines rose around the

demons. They twined the enemy's legs and continued to climb upwards. Finally, the enemies were totally twined by the vines.

A white flash shined from Maggie's body and she turned into a huge monster instantly, diving and screaming at the same time to show her strength.

"Whatever." Lightning grit her teeth and decided to speed up again. When she was about fifty meters from the enemies, she took a sudden turn and rushed down to the back of the enemies like a shooting star—she could only hit the heads of the enemies if she shot straight down, while she could expand the shooting area if she shot horizontally. And Nightingale had also repeated many times that she should fire on the widest body part of the enemy.

The demon struggled to lift his right hand twined by the vines. Dazzling light burst out from his iron gloves. Almost at the same time, Lightning pushed down the trigger. A huge boom suddenly went through the sky above of the forest.

As she expected, the attack range of the Magic Stone was really limited. The blue and white arc light just existed for a very short time. With the sounds of gunshots, blood mist burst out from the back of the demon—the bullets not only went through its body but also smashed the gas bottle on its back.

However, Maggie was not as lucky. Another demon hit her body with its lightning. Sparks burst out from her body and her mighty screams turned into terrible ones. She curled up her wings and then heavily fell down on the demon, kicking up large snowflakes. When they hit the ground, Lightning felt the ground shaking. It

was probably because of the severe impact, the demon's gas bottle was smashed and Red Mist was overflowing from under the giant bird. The little girl was very anxious and worried, looking at this.

Leaf reacted immediately. Dozens of vines gathered on Maggie's body and moved her away from the demon. The giant bird rolled in the snow twice, and lay still with her face on the ground.

Lightning rushed towards her. She held her giant head, shaking it and said, "Wake up, Maggie! Are you alright? "

"Coo... I feel numb," Maggie opened her eyes. She transformed back into her human shape with her magic power faded off and said, "what just happened?"

Lightning checked every part of her body, feeling relaxed after confirming her safety and said, "I'm glad that you're alright."

It seemed that in the shape of the flying giant monster, Maggie would not be hurt by the blood mist and she could endure more harms with her giant body. The electric arc just knocked her out for a moment, and there was a demon right below her as a cushion when she was falling down. It was a frightening attack but she was barely harmed. This could be the best out of the worst.

"Both of them are dead." Leaf moved half of her body from the trunk, examining two lifeless demons and said, "What should we do next?"

"Bring the bodies back," Lightning said, "His Highness should know how to deal with them."

Chapter 397: A Close Study

Hearing the news, Roland was shocked.

Rushing after Leaf he couldn't even attempt to question her further until they had reached the castle's backyard. As he stepped out of the castle he saw Lightning dragging two dead demons off of Maggie's back.

"Your Highness, look, we won!" Seeing the prince, the little girl jumped up straight into Roland's arms. "We defeated the demons!"

"No one is hurt?" Roland asked.

"No, everyone is fine." Lightning looked up, her eyes sparkling with eagerness and hopes of praise. Her metaphorical tail wagging was with excitement.

Roland sighed. Seeing her look of sheer joy made him reluctant to point fingers. So, instead of asking why no one had reported seeing the demons he decided to say, "I am glad there are no injuries, but what just happened exactly?"

The three witches all replied at once. Roland had to listen for a long while before he was able to piece together what had happened.

The way they told it made the fight seem easy and it was over quickly. However, there were many moments that could have

ended in disaster. If Maggie had not been able to withstand the impact of the electric arc, or if the demons had been able to shake off Leaf's restraints, the consequences would have been unthinkable.

"Don't you ever do anything like that again." Nightingale couldn't keep quiet any longer. Stepping from the cloak of her mist as she said, "To fight with demons is to leave us. With Sylvie, there is no escape."

"But we won," Lightning said while pouting.

"I call it dumb luck. Before the fight did you know Maggie was going to be hit?" Nightingale countered sternly, "I taught you to use a gun so you could protect your sisters and self. Instead, you drag them into danger!"

"No..." Lightning dropped her head in contrition and said, "I was wrong."

"And you," Nightingale said turning to Maggie, "You know you are obligated to fly back and report and yet you chose to stay? If you make a mistake like this again I won't give you anymore dried fish!"

"Sigh..." Maggie's head drooped, too.

'Nightingale is indeed the toughest witch fighter Border Town has to offer,' Roland thought, giving Nightingale a glance of

approval. Then he said, "Well, as long as it was just this once. Go and bring Tilly and Agatha to me. It's time for us to examine our new trophies."

...

In the castle's basement, on the cold stone floor lay two bodies stripped bare, their shabby clothes and meager belongings stacked beside them.

"Are they demons?" Tilly inquired while covering her nose, hoping to block the fetid stench.

"They don't look stronger than ordinary people," Ashes said, twitching her mouth.

Agatha looked glum. "Don't underestimate them. Any demon is a tough opponent, with or without magic powers. A senior demon or even a Transcendent would wear a God's Stone of Retaliation," she stated frowning. Looking over at Roland she then said. "They really showed up near the town?"

"Pretty much, Leaf said they were less than two miles from the town's city walls." Roland nodded his response while looking at the bodies displayed before him.

The demon bodies were tall, over six feet, they had strong powerful limbs, and their skin was a shade of light blue. One of the bodies appeared to be severely mutilated and the organs could be

seen peeking from its collapsed chest. It looked almost as if it had been crushed by a steam roller. This in combination with Lightning's narrative, Roland could almost see the great impact that had caused the damage.

The other body was in better shape and the only visible damage was two puncture wounds. He could still see the demons blue blood trickling from the perfect holes. Of the four shots Lightning took, only two had hit their mark, fortunately they were fatal.

The blue blood makes sense since demons don't need oxygen like humans, they have no need for hemoglobin. Technically a demons blood could be any color.

And their massive bone structure was also logical. It was necessary to support their height and powerful frame.

What is confusing is their striking resemblance to humans, minus the reproductive organs.

"How do they... reproduce with their own kind?" Roland asked Agatha curiously, "Don't they have gender differences?"

"To my knowledge, no, they don't," she said shaking her head. "It has been an unsolved mystery for me. No one can get close enough to Red Mist tower to find out. There is speculation that they were born in the tower, formed by the mist. However, the Quest Society rejected the notion claiming that the demons were regenerating and every battle was with the same demons, in different forms. They called it the 'regeneration upgrade phenomenon'."

"Regeneration upgrade phenomenon?" Ashes frowned and asked, "what is that?"

"Some of the demons that were severely wounded by our witches would again appear on the battlefield. Based on the pattern of the wounds, we could tell they were the ones that had been beaten previously even though their forms had changed. This implies that Senior Demons were not born but instead likely evolved through battle. Once they reach their full upgrade their forms would change." Agatha explained.

'Well... the magic stone technology by itself is worrying enough, and now the enemy seems to have the ability to upgrade from battle. No wonder they defeated the human beings in the last two Battles of the Divine Will.'

Roland squatted down to have a closer look at the demons' stacked clothing and belongings.

Fortunately, it did not look as if they had anything that could be considered advanced. Their belongings actually looked a little out dated. The clothing was a mix of animal skins and ugly primitive weaves. The ferocious masks were actual skulls from demonic hybrids, clearly not manufactured.

Even the transparent portion embedded into the eyes of the skulls were no more than a polished crystal, tinged and clouded from the Red Mist. While wearing the masks, they would only be able to see a bloody red shadow. How did they learn to fight with

something like this?

In addition to the clothes and masks, there were a dozen black slates and a few magic stones.'

"Has the Quest Society ever seen anything like this?" Roland asked Agatha as he laid out the slates, side by side, they made him think of the towering buildings in the red mist. A few of the slates had distorted red marking, while others had nothing you could see with the naked eye.

"That's the way demons keep records," she nodded while answering, "and they record with magic too, so we can't decode their meaning at all."

"Maybe the way they think is completely different," Tilly suggested.

"That's a possibility," Rolland agreed, "and what about the magic stones?"

"Stones of Perception, Stones of Pathfinding... and Stones of Marking," Agatha answered while glancing over them, "Nothing precious. They are only basic equipment for Scout Devils."

'Scout Devil...' Roland felt a dull pain in his head as he asked Agatha, "Does it mean that the demons have already noticed this place, and have started to send their scouts to the town?"

Chapter 398: Puzzle

"Don't bet on it." Agatha shook her head, "Based on what we experienced during the second Battle of the Divine Will, if they wanted to investigate a human town, they wouldn't act this carelessly."

"What does that mean?" asked Prince Roland.

"To make sure information makes it back to Red Mist tower, this type of reconnaissance would be conducted by two or even three platoons. Quite often the soldiers rode demonic beasts and acted as a unit, under the protection of Spear-wielding Demons," she said slowly. "In order to destroy the investigative platoons, the Union would often send out flying witches to block their rear and they would send out twice as many Blessed Warriors as there were demons for a head on assault. In the last war, the investigative platoons just kept growing in numbers and even Fearsome Demons and Flying Demons joined the recon. It would be odd for them to send out only two ordinary Mad Demons to investigate. Not to mention they were unprotected and really poorly equipped."

"Maybe they don't think it is necessary to send large platoons to investigate Border Town and that only two ordinary demons would be enough?" Ashes suggested.

"That doesn't make sense," Agatha said after a thought, refuting Ashes' theory. "During the time of the Union, every town near the border, no matter how small it was, would be protected by witches. Since the demons couldn't possibly know of the changes that have happened in the human world over the past 400 years,

they would have been more cautious and investigated like they had done previously."

"So you think... they were not here deliberately but found the town by accident?" Roland couldn't help but relax at the thought.

"Very likely." she frowned and seemed to be pondering something. "The demons probably had no idea the town was even here, but it's more likely they were scouting the area surrounding their camps. It's unlikely they thought they would meet anything more than a few demonic beasts. That would explain why they only carried Stones of Lightning for protection, instead of Stones of Unifying Strength which manifest spears that can not be used continuously."

"Wait... " Roland was startled, "You think there are demon camps near by?"

"Of course. What other reason would cause them to be out this way?" Agatha stated simply. "They must have established strongholds on the Fertile Plains and from there spread into the Barbarian Land... Oh, I forgot it is now called the Four Kingdoms."

'Awe, Hell, that's a big problem! If the enemies establish themselves under my nose, how will the town survive?' The prince worried to himself. He then asked aloud, eyebrows raised, "Are they like the camps behind the snow-capped mountains?"

"Yes, they are pretty much the same. During the war, there were several storage towers to store the Red Mist at each outpost. Each

tower was guarded by 100 to 200 demons." Agatha stated while nodding, "Considering the Bloody Moon hasn't arrived yet it is not likely that they have built a new Towering Stronghold on the Fertile Plains. Since it isn't easy to transport Red Mist the camps are probably small."

"What are you going to do?" Tilly asked, looking at Roland with concern.

"First, we find the camp—see if it really exists," he paused and said, "then... we wipe it out."

"A decisive choice," said Ashes, smiling. "That's indeed a lord's decision, and don't worry, we'll help too."

'If Agatha is right, before the third Battle of the Divine Will officially starts, demons are unable to spread their influences to the whole Fertile Plains. Given that, once the camp near the Western Region is eliminated, there will be at least a few years' peace during which demons won't have the ability to strike back even if they wanted to.

However, this plan could be risky due to the fact it would inform the demons that there are humans who live to the east of the Misty Forest and reveal that they have the ability to take the initiative and attack the demons.

If I leave the camp alone, it'll expand and cause me even bigger trouble. First, they'll probably send out more demons here after they realize those two Scout Demons are missing, and after that, it

is just a matter of time before they find the town. Second, if it is a larger camp, the demons will just increase in number and attack the town whenever they desire. Even after the Months of Demons has passed, which is very dangerous. How can I expect the First Army to complete their spring plan of attack if they are trapped in the town, busy constantly fighting demons?'

When Roland returned to his office, he immediately sent for Lightning and Maggie and quickly gave them a task,

"Please remember that you are never to act without authorization. Once you find the camp, fly back here immediately. Don't engage the demons in battle, they may have flying beasts on hand. Your first priority is to keep yourselves safe."

"Yes!"

"Coo!"

He paused before adding, "If you do find the camp, you'll be rewarded with ice cream bread for dessert after every meal this coming week."

Maggie stretched her neck and said, "You can count on us, coo!"

...

Three days later, Roland received Lightning's report. Out in the Barbarian Land, there was a place suspected to be a Demon's

Town, it was located about 130 kilometers away from Border Town.

After roughly mapping out its position, he noticed that it was right in front of the route that the Witch Cooperation Association used to follow. This was less than ten kilometers away from the place where the Association was attacked by demons.

"What do you mean when you say 'suspected'?" he asked Lightning. "Have you not seen their black stone towers?"

The little girl shook her head, her expression perplexed, "I have only seen what appears to be... wreckage."

"What?"

"What I saw was crushed black stone, broken fences pieces, and... a huge hole in the ground," she continued while rubbing her forehead, "the place looks like the one where Agatha found the relic. I didn't track any demons though. After surveying the destruction, I flew back here immediately."

"'Another hole?' Roland was stunned, 'Are there giant maggot-like beasts inside this hole too? Last time, there were maggot-like beasts with the relic and they devoured the stone towers remains, this time... did they swallow the demon camp as well?"

Did I miss some important clue that links those two events?"

He shook his head and pushed aside the puzzling pieces and asked, "Did you find anything else?"

"No... the camp was deserted. There were no demons there." Lightning replied.

"And no sparkling magic stones either, Coo!" Maggie added.

"I see," Roland mulled over the information he had been given and then quickly began to make arrangements. He looked over at the white haired girl and said, "You take Nightingale and Soraya to the suspected camp site and get pictures of the scene. Then escort Nightingale and Sylvie there so they can check it out further."

"Why not just let Soraya and Sylvie go there together?" asked Lightning.

"Just in case the demons have flying beasts that Maggie can't get rid of," Roland explained briefly. "Nightingale can use her Mist to help you escape. In any dangerous situation, you just get out of there as quickly as possible."

...

Soraya's "photo" of the scene was soon placed in front of Roland.

Just as Lightning had described, there was a massive crater in the ground, stretching five to six meters across, with broken debris scattered around its edge. The fringe of the hole looked almost like

the earth and been churned from below. The snow and dirt were mixed, along with various pieces of the crushed black stone and that was exactly how it looked, like it had been crushed by a massive creature.

Sylvie's findings made him even more uneasy—the underground passage there led towards the snow-capped mountains, the same direction as the one relic they found in the Misty Forest.

Both tunnels led to the same place.

Chapter 399: Contact

In the basement of the palace, King's City, Kingdom of Graycastle.

Timothy sat on the throne with his cheek resting on his right hand. He watched impatiently as the candidates performed their assassination stunts.

"How many fools have I watched since winter began?

I must have been too lenient recently, to have allowed these clowns to perform."

He sneezed and felt the dryness in his eyes.

Ever since the Hall of Sky Dome was destroyed by snow powder, Timothy had moved the venue of the Council Meeting to the basement of the palace. After some renovation, including opening up several storage chambers, the total space was large enough to accommodate all of the Council's ministers and nobles. Most importantly, this place was absolutely safe. There was only one entrance, and the magnificent palace was directly above. No amount of snow powder could disrupt matters in here. The only disadvantage was the lack of sunlight, and thus light had to be supplied using turpentine torches. The torches, which were placed on the surrounding walls, caused the air in the room to become abnormally dry and stuffy. Furthermore, the turpentine gave off a sweet yet foul smell which made Timothy feel drowsy.

Whenever he thought about his Fourth Brother, Timothy would become furious and spiteful. Had it not been for the eyewitnesses who noticed that the attacks came from the sky, Timothy would probably still be building guard towers recklessly. After he realized that this method was completely ineffective, all he could do was to hold his meetings in this place for the time being.

"Roland Wimbledon will surely pay for this!"

"Your Highness." The voice of a candidate disrupted his thoughts. "Have a look. If that traitor Roland ever dares to appear in front of me, I'll accomplish the mission that you've entrusted to me!"

Timothy took a swift glance at the candidate. In a split second, the candidate landed four flying knives accurately on a barrel that was twenty steps away.

"Is this the stunt that you mentioned?"

"Indeed, Your Highness," he replied assuredly. "Frankly speaking, I was in this line of business previously. I've killed dozens of Rats using this method. If I hide in a crowd, most of my targets won't even know where the knives are flying out from."

"How much do you want?" Timothy shifted his stiff body a little.

"Just 25 gold royals," the candidate counted his fingers and said, "five of which will be used to cover the cost of my journey and my disguise—I'll dress in a common and unattractive fashion in order

to get closer to the traitor."

"Knight Weimar." The King beckoned.

"Yes, Your Highness." Steelheart Knight walked into the hall, brandishing his saber and shield.

"Your Highness, what do you mean by this?" The candidate was startled.

"If you defeat my knight, I'll give you your reward straight away." Timothy winked at Knight Weimar.

The latter nodded his head. Then, he took off his head armor and walked towards the candidate.

"Wait, wait... no, Your Highness, this won't do." The candidate flipped his body distressedly to dodge the knight's incoming slashes, and stammered, "I can't fight head on! Ah!"

The knight swiftly followed up with a vicious kick to his stomach, causing him to swallow the rest of his words.

After rolling on the floor for a while, the candidate flimsily flung a flying knife at the knight, but it was easily deflected by the knight's shield. The knight stomped on the candidate's hand and, using his sword, sliced off half of the candidate's arm. Blood spilled on to the ground in a curved line.

"My hand...!" the candidate cried in pain. He held onto the remainder of his right arm and coiled his body.

"Firstly, the royal family isn't as dumb as your average target. Even that foolish brother of mine won't easily go near crowds. And secondly, if you can't even handle a knight, what makes you think you're able to assassinate a lord who's protected by many knights? I'm afraid that once you receive the 25 gold royals, you'll never be seen again." Timothy gestured with his hands. "Throw him out."

Had it been a month or two ago, he would not even entertain this bunch of ignorant and greedy people. He had given a small sum of money to those whom he deemed to have a slight chance of succeeding—yet until now, Roland was still alive and kicking.

It was probably because of this 'benevolent' attitude that caused more and more people to come forward and declare that they could solve the problems created by the traitor, and the methods they proposed became increasingly absurd. There was even a fella who suggested using a tavern maid as the assassin, claiming that her technique was outstanding and that no man could refuse her service. "Utter ignorance! Don't they know the difference between a normal female and a witch?" It was already well-publicized that Roland had raised and groomed several witches, so there was zero chance that Roland would fall for someone so cheap.

Timothy let out a long sigh. "By teaching these ignorant candidates a lesson, perhaps others will think twice about coming forth.

Maybe it was a mistake to recruit an assassin from the citizenry.

The only things that could defeat Roland are pills and snow powder."

He swept a glance around the hall, and, seeing that there were no outsiders remaining, he asked the Prime Minister, "How's the progress of the development of the snow powder weapon?"

According to successive intelligence gathered from Longsong Stronghold, the reason that Border Town miners were able to defeat the Duke's knights and the mad militia was because they used an unusual snow powder weapon. It was, in all likelihood, a semi-closed iron pipe which made use of the force generated by the explosion of snow powder to propel a lead shot towards the target, similar to how a crossbow worked. Timothy was highly interested in this, and had immediately gathered the experienced blacksmiths of King's City to begin creating an imitation of this unique weapon.

"Not ideal, Your Highness." Marquis Wyke shook his head. "The blacksmiths have created 10 or so prototypes of this weapon in accordance with the intelligence, but none of them have anywhere close to the alleged firepower. Only a few can penetrate a knight's breastplate within 10 steps, while all are inaccurate over 50 steps."

"10 steps?" Timothy frowned. "Might as well aim at the face, no? At this rate, how are we going to stop the charging knights?"

"Indeed, there may be some tricks we have yet to master... Another thing, even if we gather all of the city's blacksmiths and

apprentices, we can at most produce 20 of these weapons per month, and there's no guarantee that every one of them will work." The Marquis sighed. "Until today, there have been four cases of iron pipes exploding during training, and the guards are rather reluctant about training with this kind of snow powder weapon."

Damn it. Border Town was several times poorer than King's City, yet Roland was able to produce hundreds of iron pipes in one winter. He must have received the assistance of demons.

Timothy angrily switched the topic. "How about the pills? Hasn't the church replied to us yet?"

"Yes, Your Highness." The Marquis responded. "The High Priest said that Holy City was busy fighting the invasion of the demonic beasts, and therefore temporarily unable to provide more pills of madness. He hoped that we could wait until after the Months of Demons to discuss things."

"I don't want to see the traitor remain peacefully in the castle of Western Region, not even one day longer!"

"Looks like I have to personally write a letter to the Holy City of Hermes," Timothy thought spitefully. "In the future, if they want to continue recruiting believers in the Kingdom of Graycastle, they'll have to bring pills for exchange."

Just as he was about to announce the end of the day's Council Meeting, the Minister for Diplomacy, Sir Bullet, suddenly walked

up to him and said, "Your Highness, messengers from the Kingdom of Dawn have arrived in King's City, and they wish to see you."

Chapter 400: Alliance Agreement

"According to the customary practice, the reception of messengers from other kingdoms should be conducted in the Hall of Sky Dome. However, it was only recently cleared of rubble from the collapsed ceiling and is still a long way from restoration." As Timothy thought about this, his resentment against Roland grew.

"Bring them to my study," Timothy ordered. After a brief hesitation, he decided to receive them in the palace anyway. No matter what, it would be rude to receive messengers in the basement.

He was clueless as to why the Kingdom of Dawn would send messengers to the Kingdom of Graycastle at this time, especially with no prior notification. Had it been one of the other two kingdoms instead, it would most certainly be a request for aid—either for food or materials to resist the winter cold. There was a saying among the nobility that people who made contact in summer were friends, while those who did in winter were enemies. It held true among all of the kingdoms, except for the Kingdom of Dawn. Although its territory was small, it did not lack in materials, and, in fact, it sold a large amount of food and cloth to the Kingdom of Graycastle every year in exchange for perfumes and crystals.

Timothy shook his head discreetly. He had many things to attend to and therefore intended to dismiss the messengers as early as possible.

When he returned to his study, he saw that the two members of

the emissary delegation had been waiting for a long time under the companion of Sir Bullet. Upon seeing His Majesty enter the room, they stood up and bowed. "To the honorable king of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Wimbledon IV, the king of the Kingdom of Dawn sends his regards."

"Bring him my regards too." Timothy nodded inattentively. "Have a seat."

He noticed that the pair of messengers, which comprised of a man and a woman, was very young and looked rather alike. The family insignia on their chests was an antler scepter, and if he did not remember wrongly, this meant that they came from the illustrious Luoxi Family of the Kingdom of Dawn.

"What exactly is Mia IV thinking? Why did he send these young 'uns?" Timothy felt rather curious. Nobles of this age were typically haughty and arrogant, and were vastly different from older nobles who would fight for every little bit of benefit on the negotiating table.

"Are you both members of the Zulu Family?" Timothy pointed to their chests. "I once briefly met Duke Luoxi."

"Indeed, Your Highness." The young man smiled. "I'm Otto Luoxi. This is my younger sister, Belinda Luoxi."

"They're even siblings." Timothy raised his eyebrows. "If that's the case, I don't have to beat around the bush with them."

"It's currently the massacre period of the Months of Demons. Why did the king of the Kingdom of Dawn send you here?" Timothy took the lead and asked. "I guess you are neither short of cotton and cloth, nor of wheat and bread. And of course, even if you met with a disaster, the aid that I can provide is very limited—you should know that the Royal Decree on the Selection of Crown Prince has left my kingdom in a mess. Many places have come to a standstill, and just helping the refugees has stretched the City Hall thin. It's very difficult for me to pull out more supplies."

"With regard to this, I express my deepest regrets," Otto felt his chest and said. "However, Mia IV did not send us here to request aid, but to respond to an even more dangerous threat."

His words startled Timothy. "What threat?"

"The church, Your Highness," Belinda replied. "Currently, the Church's army has seized the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart, and large numbers of refugees have swamped into the Kingdom of Dawn. According to the information the refugees brought, the church's methods are abominable and in serious violation of the rules of engagement agreed among the nobility. Those who resist are either hanged or exiled, while only the nobles who agree to switch allegiance are allowed to live."

"This method intends to completely eliminate the noble class and bring the territories under the full control of the church," Otto spoke in a rather heavy tone. "Mia IV believes that the Kingdom of Wolfheart won't be their last target. Given the critical situation that both our kingdoms are in, the church is likely to bring the flames of war to our lands in the coming year. Our king hopes that

we can work together and fight back against the church."

"Are you sure that Wolfheart City has already been captured?" After hearing from the other party, Timothy began to frown.

"A thousand times sure, Your Highness." The two messengers nodded in unison.

Timothy had caught wind of the church's aggressive war, but he did not expect that it would be able to seize two large kingdoms in such a short period of time. If the messengers were not lying, the strength displayed by the church was a little too frightening.

Certainly, it was best to verify this matter with the Minister of Intelligence first. The early arrival of snow during the Months of the Demons had impeded his caravan's route, and thus he had not received messages from the Kingdom of Wolfheart for a very long time.

After a long silence, Timothy asked, "What's the specific plan?"

Otto moistened his lips and pulled out a map underneath his arm. Spreading the map in front of Timothy, he said, "If the church sets off from Holy City and attacks the Kingdom of Dawn or the Kingdom of Graycastle, then the other kingdom should lead an army towards the north and invade the Holy City of Hermes. Doing so will suppress the church's offensive and divide its troops."

"Is this an offensive-defensive agreement?"

"Indeed, Your Highness," Otto replied. "No matter the starting point is Coldwind Ridge of the Kingdom of Graycastle, or Northshire of the Kingdom of Dawn, it'll be possible to reach the Holy City of Hermes in a week's time. As long as our main forces are stationed in these two places, the church may decide to retreat wisely—it'll be a blessing to both kingdoms if we can prevent this war from happening."

"If that's the case, I might as well forget about buying pills from the church." Timothy thought silently. "But without them, how am I supposed to drive Roland Wimbledon out of the Western Region?"

Timothy understood that precautions had to be taken against the church. But he felt that it was best to first purchase the pills he needed and unify the entire Kingdom of Graycastle before he reached an agreement with the Kingdom of Dawn.

"This is a matter of great importance. I'll need to consult with my ministers before I decide. The two of you can stay in the palace while you wait for my decision."

"Sure, Your Highness."

"There's another thing I would like to ask. How much do you know about the situation in the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart? Did all of the information come from refugees by word-of-mouth?"

"There are a few reports from spies, but not many... When the church sieged Broken Tooth Castle and Wolfheart City, it also sealed off the surrounding roads. That's why we don't know much about the progress of the battle," Otto replied. "According to the refugees, the church used a terrifying siege weapon which demolished the walls of Wolfheart City in only one day."

"It was probably a snow powder weapon, which was possibly revealed from Garcia's side." Timothy gestured with his hands and asked, "I'm not interested in this. Have you heard of any news about the Blacksail Fleet or Garcia Wimbledon?"

"This..." The two messengers exchanged glances before Belinda said cautiously, "We heard that when Garcia was fleeing from King's City together with the King of Wolfheart, she was struck by the church's arrows and perished."

"Garcia was with the King of Wolfheart?" Timothy's heart skipped a beat. "Was her body found?"

"Not that we're aware of. Judging from the church's publicity after the siege, as well as the lack of news from the Kingdom of Wolfheart, it's highly unlikely that they managed to escape."

"Really..." Timothy exhaled and felt a little relieved. Although there was a bit of regret, this was one of the few pieces of good news he had heard since winter arrived, and he hoped that the messengers were right. "Okay then, you two can go and have a rest."

As the messengers took their leave, a smile began to form on his face. "Hear that, Roland Wimbledon? This is the kind of demise which, as a fellow insurgent, you'll end up in as well."